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A TRIBUTE

"An allied fleet of more than a thousand planes raided Berlin again last night. A considerable amount of damage was done, and only thirty of our planes failed to return. . . ."

ONLY thirty planes—ONLY thirty crews—ONLY fifty, a hundred, two hundred of our boys failed to return . . . !

To those who failed to return: Privensal, Browne, Dean, Fox, Welch, Collins, Michelson, and many others—I dedicate this book.

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CHAPTER ONE

Over the Hump

SIX OF US were sitting around the battered old card table in the barnlike shack that served as pilots' operations at the Kunming terminal of China National Aviation Corporation. The cold fog settling slowly over the airfield had driven everyone indoors except the mechanics and field attendants who were refueling our planes.

I was \$112 in the hole—I remember this distinctly because it was just the beginning of a bad run of luck at stud poker. Bob Robertson of Macon, Georgia, and his co-pilot, a Chinese boy named Waty Sung, were leading by a heavy margin, each having a stack of lettuce in front of him like the harvest from a Victory garden back home. Eddie Quinn, also Chinese and co-pilot on Captain Al Gingiss' ship, was a little ahead, too; but Bill Fox of

Dalhart, Texas, my co-pilot, and young Tsui, our radio-man, were right with me—at the bottom of our pockets. By every law of chance, it seemed to me, one of us was about due for a winning hand. So it was an awkward time to hear Flight Superintendent Potts Schmidt shouting:

“Captain Genovesel! Hey, Gen!” And then in a muffled, impatient aside, “Where the hell is that guy?”

“Potty” Potts Schmidt wasn’t normally profane, nor was he normally impatient. Only when he had something to do that he didn’t want to do, did he let himself get out of control. I knew he didn’t want to have to tell me this something-or-other, whatever it was; but his first concern now, just as it had been through all the long months since the closing of the Burma Road, was running his part of C.N.A.C. in the way it would do the most good for China and Chiang Kai-shek.

“Potty” was a big man, about forty, with a fighter’s build. Standing behind his desk with his hands in his hip pockets and his broad shoulders hunched, his big blond head had to tilt down to look at me. In fact, my five feet eight inches looked pretty small among most of the boys flying across the Himalaya Hump between Kunming, in China’s Yunnan Province, and Assam, India.

“Got a job for you, Gen,” Potts Schmidt said. “Thirty-two passengers—and they’re all hot to get started.” He glanced at his office window, getting steadily grayer with fog, and shook his head. “Let me know what route you’ll take so we’ll know where to look for the pieces.”

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China National doesn't fly for pleasure. There were no tourists among those thirty-two passengers. They were already gathered on the field. As I passed close to them to give them the once-over I realized why "Potty" hadn't let the pilots themselves decide who would fly the passengers and who would fly cargo. Two of the group were Allied generals I had flown before, and one of them had once before taken the stubborn attitude of refusing to fly the Hump with anyone but "the little fella." I confess I liked the compliment, but sometimes—as at that particular moment—I wished he preferred to fly with anyone but "the little fella."

You have a terrific feeling of responsibility—flying a group like that. Aside from the generals there were many high Chinese officers and a few civilians. Among the latter I recognized a confidential adviser to General Chiang Kai-shek and a Foreign-Office big shot. They were all people that really deserved to get where they were going, and I wished to hell that it wasn't my responsibility to get them there.

I checked with Potts Schmidt just before taking off and said I would fly the north route. His information from Captain Gingiss, who had been the last one in from Assam about eight o'clock that morning, was that the stratus formation ran up only to about 15,000 feet—above that it was clear—but that there was a sleet storm blowing near Lake Tali.

Our take-off wasn't too bad: the fog was thin enough across the field so I could see the ground a hundred yards

ahead; it was just a matter of giving both engines of my Douglas C-53 everything they had and then the instant we were off the runway, pulling up the gear so we wouldn't trip on the trees hiding at the end of the strip.

Clear of the field, Fox and I relaxed and I settled down to the serious business of climbing up to 15,000 feet where I would find that promised clear sailing. Fox grinned at our present zero visibility and nodded toward the cabin where the passengers were huddled. Then in his slow, Texas drawl he said, "This heah fog doan't make me mad today, Gen. Kinda makes up for what those boys did to us at stud pokah." He shook his head and said what had been running through my own mind: "If it was a clear day those Japs would be flockin' around like dogs after a bitch, to bag a load like this."

There wasn't much poetry in the remark, but there was plenty of truth. We never carried guns on China National transports—they weighed too much and cut down on cargo capacity—and our only protection against Jap attacks were bad weather and our own flying ability. Outmaneuvering Jap Zeros with our capacity-loaded C-53's and C-47's might seem on the impossible side; but it was done more than once—frequently by flying so low the Japs couldn't get under us, and then zigzagging to dodge their dives; more often by running straight for the nearest cloud and flying around inside it until the Zeros, poorly equipped for that sort of game because of their limited gas capacity, struck out for other targets or returned to their base. It is a matter of considerable pride

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to China National that it loses only three or four planes a year on the Himalaya run—and most of those losses are due to terrain rather than enemy action.

At 12,000 feet, Fox and I and Tsui, our radioman, put on our oxygen masks and kept right on climbing. My hope of getting into the clear at 15,000 was fading by then; the soup seemed to get thicker the higher we went. And, as a matter of fact, it didn't clear until we were at more than 18,000 feet.

For almost two hours we had good flying except for a strong wind blowing north. I held a course aiming a few degrees south of the field at Assam to allow for the wind, but, having no ground contact or radio beam to follow, there was no way of knowing whether the justification was great enough until we should come out, a couple of hours later, below the ceiling.

A further trouble in flying at that height was that we were drawing heavily on our limited supply of oxygen. It was unusual for us to fly at so steep an altitude until we got over the high points of the Hump; but on this trip we were forced up there within the first half-hour of the flight.

According to my calculations we were considerably north and east of Lake Tali when Fox and I caught our first glimpse of the purplish-gray wall rising thousands of feet high straight ahead of us and to either side as far as we could see. It was a good quarter-hour's flying time away, but there was no doubt in either of our minds as to what this signified.

"Cap'n Gingiss' sleet has moved a little bit no'th," Bill drawled, and after a few more minutes, shortly before we eased into the wall of ice, he turned the switch on our de-icing boots.

I could feel him looking at me a moment later and I glanced down at the wing on my side. The boot was motionless. The mechanism wasn't working. The leading edges of the wings should have been pulsating with steady rhythm under their rubber covers, but they were perfectly sleek and still.

"How much drag can we take and still make it, Gen?" Bill asked quietly.

"If we're on course there shouldn't be any hills higher than 16,000 feet from here on," I said.

But that was a pretty big "if." I couldn't be sure how far off our course the wind was blowing us, and I knew there were peaks shooting a lot higher than 16,000 feet that weren't too many miles to the north. I gave the ship more throttle and pulled back on the stick. We went into the sleet at 19,000 feet.

I handed Tsui a note giving our estimated position for him to radio to Dinjan in code. Our sets weren't strong enough to send word messages unless we were within a half-hour's flying time of either base. Tsui took the note, switched on the transmitter—and then began to curse quietly in Chinese. A few minutes later he handed back the note with a brief message appended: "Radio dead."

If there was one thing C.N.A.C. couldn't properly boast about back in early 1943 it was the flying equipment they

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were using on that toughest of all air routes—the trans-Himalaya run. All of the planes had seen better (and much younger) days, and whereas in the States to have a radio go dead was rare, it was quite commonplace—almost a thing to be expected—in China and India. Parts, of course, were not easily obtained; the sets were old; and for the most part the radio technicians, with two exceptions, were far from skilled.

I cursed a little myself, but there was nothing to do about it. We were out of contact with the base, strictly on our own. That was bad, but it could have been worse. We were far north, well out of the Jap territory along the Burma frontier, so we had no Zeros to worry about. On the southern route a dead radio meant you could neither give nor receive vital information about enemy activity in the neighborhood.

There are two kinds of ice found over the Himalayas in northern China and lower Tibet: the wet, sloppy kind that sloshes over your aircraft and molds itself to the shape of the wings and fuselage before freezing hard; and the “clear” ice that comes at your plane in hard little nuggets, caking together in blocky lumps on the leading edges of the wings and even on the blades of the props. Since it breaks their smooth contour, that caking-up of ice on the wings cuts heavily into their lifting power. And there is danger when the ice thickens on the props, because the only way it can be shaken off is by running up the R.P.M.—pushing the pitch-control lever forward to give the props a sudden burst of speed.

Much of the ice would be thrown free by centrifugal force—this was fine if it came off in small pieces—but if it cracked loose in big chunks considerable damage could be done to the plane.

For the first half-hour after we got into the storm we had wet ice, and our only real difficulty was holding our altitude against the increasing weight as the ice accumulated. But our oxygen was getting dangerously low and I had to tell Tsui to take off his mask. We could get along without the radio if he passed out, but there had to be someone at the controls. That meant simply that either Fox or I had to keep going; we could feel sorry for Tsui, but that was all.

Looking back upon that moment, in view of what followed, I find a surprisingly clear recollection of that Chinese lad's face as he pulled off his mask. In the expression of an American I would have expected to see a certain resentment, a certain self-pity. In that Chinese boy's placid, round brown face there was only understanding. He knew what our cargo was; he knew how important it was to get those passengers to their destination. It was fundamental with him that any sacrifice he might be called upon to make was in the natural course of things. I am sure it never occurred to him that I felt like a dog for having to tell him to take off his mask.

With Tsui off the oxygen I felt a little easier, but our supply was still short if we were going to have to stay at that altitude for any length of time. And with every passing minute it seemed more evident that the storm was a

wide one, accompanied not only with changing stages in the sleet formations—one minute wet ice and the next minute clear and chunky—but the wind was changing, too. We would be bucking violent head winds for ten minutes, then suddenly the ice would be lashing hard against the window at my left. That would mean the wind had changed—was driving in from the southwest, and pushing us dangerously farther north.

Tsui was pretty light on his feet when he got up out of his seat, mumbling something about taking a look at the passengers. Concentrating as I was on what was ahead of me, I was still aware of his opening the door into the cabin, and then, after a moment, tottering forward and leaning over my shoulder. He dropped a note into my hand. "Three passengers conscious," it read. I could picture the scene back there with twenty-nine of the poor devils sprawled on the floor, probably turning blue from lack of oxygen and the intense cold. But there was nothing to do about that, either, except to hope we would get to Dinjan before any of them died.

I shot a quick glance at the Chinese boy and I knew that the passengers weren't the only ones taking a beating from the altitude and the lack of oxygen. As Tsui stumbled back to his own nook behind Fox and me I began to feel some real alarm myself.

The oxygen gauge showed that we could hold out about twenty minutes more if Fox and I both continued to draw on the supply. If I cut off Fox, I could hang on twice as long, perhaps even for three-quarters of an

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hour. On the other hand, if we were on our course the breakthrough was due in less than half an hour.

My calculations on how long the oxygen would last were based, of course, on the miserly way we were using it. My own head was already getting light, and I knew that Bill Fox's would be even lighter. After all, he hadn't been through this particular mill as often as I had, and you do get accustomed to even such things as not having enough air to breathe.

Thinking of Fox and beginning to feel one of those hunches that we were off our course, I leaned over toward Bill and said, "We'll take the stuff in shifts. Two minutes at a time. then switch." I had my own mask off

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to tell the direction in which the sleet was blowing, and thus the direction of the wind. Using that as an index, I had felt a certain amount of confidence that no mountain peak would suddenly loom up in our path; it would have been betrayed by the shifting currents in the sleet.

Now, with that gray film making an impenetrable coating on the inside of the windshields, even daylight failed to show through the glass. I had a nail file in an inside pocket; with numb fingers I opened my jacket and took it out. Signaling Fox to take the controls, I leaned forward and started digging at the frost on the glass.

We were at 20,500 feet when I started clearing the windshield, and when two thin scratches had been dug in the frost I told Fox to let us down to about 18,000 while I kept on digging with the nail file. The clearing was about one inch deep and three inches wide a couple of minutes later when I suddenly let out a yell that for its sheer terror ought to be legend in those Tibetan hills by now.

We were at 18,500 feet and the overcast had abruptly begun to thin. The next instant we were in the clear and heading directly at a snow-capped mountain peak that rose to a good 19,000 feet. "I've got it!" I shouted, and grabbing the controls I threw that old C-53 into the screamingest chandelle she had ever made. Full throttle and hard left rudder, with her nose pulled almost straight up, the old crate groaned and her wings strained so violently we could hear the ice cracking at every joint. And then all we could do was wait. It seemed like a lifetime,

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but of course it was only a matter of seconds before we knew we had cleared the peak.

You miss crashing like that once in a lifetime; and when you do, you lean back and say, "Thanks, God." After that, if you have time, you say it again and again, and then again. But I didn't have time for more than the first one. We were in Tibet; how far in I didn't know. And the Himalayas go up and up and up, climbing steadily from the Bay of Bengal north through Burma and India and China until beyond the Tibetan border they reach upwards of 24,000 feet. We were back in the overcast; we had a plane with a full load of thirty-two passengers; we were carrying another thousand pounds of ice; our oxygen was practically gone—and we were in an area of mountains that the plane might not have got over if it had been carrying nothing more than the weight of the crew.

I kept the motors at full throttle and took the highest altitude the ship would take, 21,000 feet; then I motioned Fox to remove his mask. I put on my own and drew in a couple of deep draughts. I looked back at Tsui and saw the blueness filtering through his yellow skin. He was out cold. He wouldn't look alive again until we got down to earth. So I cocked a thumb at him, looked at Fox and said, "Go ahead, Bill. Take him with you and jump."

Fox always maintained later that he didn't hear me, and maybe he didn't. He was looking pretty wacky, his eyes wide and his mouth loose when he grinned. But whether he heard me or not, he just sat there, staring half

at me and half at the frost on the windshield. He didn't make a move.

You can memorize all the orders you like—and China National's orders always were to save ourselves and to hell with the plane and its cargo—but even at a time like that when death seemed just ahead of the next piece of sleet, nobody that I ever flew with could say to himself: "It's too bad, passengers, but some of us have to live," and take to his chute.

Even while we were gaining altitude I had begun to correct our course, pulling the ship hard off to the southwest, and the flight became a battle not only against the winds blowing north but against the ice that kept dragging us down. We could hold to 21,100 feet even at full throttle for a matter of only ten or fifteen minutes; then the altimeter began to show a steady decline. Our one hope was to get out of the high mountain ranges before we were dragged too low.

At the time of that flight, in February of 1943, Bill Fox had only been with us a couple of months. He still hadn't checked out as a full pilot, and there were a lot of things he hadn't seen that most of us with C.N.A.C. were more or less accustomed to—and I say "more or less" advisedly.

St. Elmo's Fire, for instance. I don't care how many times a man sees that, it always does something to him. Gingiss, Privensal, Johnson, "Skippy" Lane, all the boys I flew with in China felt the same way.

We pulled through those Tibetan peaks by the grace of God—there's no other way of accounting for it—and

got ourselves well south of the heavy ice. But when the ice began to thin, it turned into just plain ice water; then this phenomenon of St. Elmo's began.

I had been riding with it for some ten minutes—Fox was only semi-conscious in the co-pilot's seat—and the blue flame licking at the windshield and along the leading edges of the wings wasn't bothering me at all. That is, I had overcome that initial fright it always brings with it. It was there; I couldn't do anything about it; so to hell with it.

But I reached out to set the gyrocompass and that was when Fox first noticed it. My hand was still two inches away from the instrument when the blue flame leaped across like an arc light, throwing a dim blue flash through the cockpit. Fox screamed—I know he did, although he always denied it—and I laughed. I felt as though I had pulled a trick that he couldn't understand. I was delighted—in the way, of course, that only a man with too little oxygen in his lungs can be delighted. And for all the tungsten I had carried from China to India I couldn't have explained to poor Fox then that St. Elmo's Fire was a phenomenon of static electricity, generated by the rain beating against the plane, under peculiar climatic conditions that exist in only a few parts of the world. The fire is truly dangerous because it's real fire. If you were carrying a cargo of gasoline it could easily mean an explosion in mid-air. Our cargo was not combustible, so I was not worried on that score, but Bill Fox passed completely out the moment he had finished his hysterical

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scream. And he didn't come to until we were within sight of the field at Dinjan, in Assam Province, India.

Our emergence from that Himalayan storm was one of the most abrupt things I've ever encountered in the air, in either fog-bound England or in China. It was just as if a window shade had snapped up to let in the sunshine. We were out of the storm. The grayness of the windows turned to silver light. From that brilliant gleam they took on the myriad hues of a rainbow. India's sun, even at 18,000 feet, was turning our world of ice into water.

I took the ship down at 1,000 feet per minute and at 10,000 feet I reached over and pushed with gigantic effort to open the side window and get a breath of air. A two-year-old should have been able to open it with one finger, but I was so weak from lack of oxygen it took almost my last ounce of strength.

At 6,000 feet we swept out of the clouds. Below us I could see the Brahmaputra River running its smooth blue ribbon through the deep green blanket of India's Assam Valley. Fox had come around and was sheepishly reorganizing himself at the auxiliary controls; Tsui was stirring behind us, and he and the passengers would soon be all right. I felt different about the world at that moment than I ever had before. It was a wonderful place, it really was.

I could appreciate it especially because I had just come from a preview of a pilot's Hell—where there's not enough air to breathe, where there's ice on your wings and your de-icers don't work, where frost is on your wind-

shield and St. Elmo's Fire dances before your eyes, and where snow-capped mountain peaks rise up out of nowhere to smash you and your plane to frozen, undiscoverable pieces—and where your passengers are people upon whom the fate of the civilized world might depend.

As we came in over the airfield at Dinjan and Tsui went back to tell our passengers to get ready to land, I had two very specific thoughts in my still slightly woozy mind. Some day I would write a book about what I had been through in the past two years, flying freight and passengers for China and ferrying planes for the R. A. F.; that was one idea. The second was crazy, too, but different because it was a memory out of the past that I would rather have forgotten.

"I'm going to make it this time, Bill," I said to Fox, my co-pilot. "I'm going to set her down neat as a pin, and Captain Bridgit, that old dog, won't have a chance to wash me out this time."

Fox, of course, didn't know what I was talking about. I hadn't seen Captain Bridgit for years. He had nothing whatever to say about me or about anything I did or did not do now. He was in the Army Air Corps and I was a civilian pilot for the China National Aviation Corporation. But what I was thinking about was all the trouble I had gone through to get into Randolph Field back in 1938—and then that last flight of mine as a cadet when Bridgit (a darned nice guy, I had always thought before) washed me out as an Army pilot with the remark on my final papers: "A dangerous flier."

CHAPTER TWO

Randolph Field—"West Point of the Air"

ONE DAY late in July of 1938 a dark-haired, slightly built young man, weighing about a hundred and forty-five pounds and standing five feet eight in his socks, walked into the Army Air Corps offices at Mitchell Field, New York, and told the officer in charge that he wanted to file an application for admission to Randolph Field, the Army's "West Point of the Air."

"Ever done any flying?" the officer inquired.

Yes, the young man had. His log book showed five hundred hours in the air. He had a transport pilot's license. He had carried passengers in chartered planes up and down most of the East Coast; he had towed advertising banners and done a lot of sky writing; he had studied celestial navigation under Professor Spaulding of New York University; and he had materially assisted in pre-

paring the charts and maps for the Great Circle transatlantic flight of Dick Merrill a few years before.

The application forms were given to him. The young man returned to his parents' home in Brooklyn and, seated at the little writing desk in the study parlor, he filled them out. A few weeks later, in August, he was notified to appear at Mitchell Field for a physical examination and an interview with the Board of Examiners. At the appointed time in August, the young man was on hand, and not until he had successfully passed both those tests did he begin to get tangled up in Army red tape.

His appointment, he was told, would be for the July class the following year.

"July? Next year?" the young man exclaimed, his dark eyes bugging at the assembled officers. "But that will be too late!"

"Too late for what?" one of the officers inquired.

"I'll be twenty-seven by then!" the young man cried. "I'll be twenty-seven in February—and then I'll be too old."

The Army men pondered that problem for several moments, and then they solemnly shook their heads. "Too bad. That's really too bad," they decided—and that concluded the interview.

The young man was angry. He was wrathful. On the way back to Brooklyn he asked himself what the hell sort of a set-up was this, anyway? Here the Army was crying for men twenty-six or under, and they wanted him to wait until he was twenty-seven, and thus too old to fly.

When he arrived home he put a long-distance call through to Washington, to the Major General at Army Air Corps headquarters. When he finally got the General on the wire the young man's voice trembled as he presented his case.

I know about the trembling of the young man's voice, because I was the young man.

"How much does it mean to you to get that appointment, Mr. Genovese?" the General asked after I had given my overheated account of what I had just been through.

"It means everything in the world to me, General," I said. "Absolutely everything."

There was a long silence at the other end of the wire and then the General said, "In that case, young man, you'll get your appointment in the next two or three days . . ."

I still remember Randolph Field as I saw it for the first time in September of 1938. On the train from New York I had met a boy named Forrest Harsh, a slow-spoken, good-natured redhead from Florida. He had been washed out of West Point and now he had his heart set on being an Army flier. When we were met at the depot by a couple of courteous young officers in a station wagon who escorted us out to the field, Harsh shook his head and whispered, "There's something wrong in this picture, Gen." But when we saw the grounds at Randolph, as beautifully landscaped and cared for as any fine country club, and swept serenely up the drive to

the magnificent, modernistic administration building, even he began to lose his apprehensions regarding the lot of a newcomer in this Army school.

"I thought we'd have to crawl the last hundred yards on our hands and knees," Harsh said. "Maybe they do things different here than at West Point."

But they didn't. Not much different, anyway. We were honored guests for just that first day. After that the three hundred new dodos were the lowliest, most contemptible and unspeakable cads on the face of the earth—in the eyes of the upper classmen. The hazing was terrific. "ON THE DOUBLE, MISTER!" On the double *to where*? Why, that was for *you* to figure out! And woe to the "dodo" who didn't do his figuring fast. "THERE ARE ONLY THREE ANSWERS AROUND HERE, MISTER! YES, SIR, NO, SIR, AND NO EXCUSE, SIR. DO YOU UNDERSTAND, MISTER?"

How grossly I fumbled on that one! "I understand, sir." It took me forty-five minutes to memorize the prescribed formula for making up for such a blunder: "SIR, MY HEAD IS MADE OF VERMONT MARBLE AND AFRICAN IVORY, COVERED WITH A THICK LAYER OF CASE-HARDENED STEEL, WHICH FORMS AN IMPENETRABLE BARRIER TO ALL THAT SEEKS TO IMPRESS ITSELF UPON THE ASHEN TISSUE OF MY POOR BRAIN; HENCE, THE EFFULGENT AND OSTENTATIOUSLY EFFERVESCENT PHRASES JUST NOW DIRECTED AND REITERATED FOR MY COMPREHENSION HAVE FAILED TO PENETRATE THE SOMNIFEROUS FORCES OF MY ATROCIOUS INTELLIGENCE. IN OTHER WORDS, SIR, I AM VERY, VERY DUMB AND DO NOT UNDERSTAND!"

AT RANDOLPH FIELD

It was terror then, that hazing, the sharp edges on it only slightly dulled by the friendly advice of Forrest Harsh, who had been through it all once at West Point and so knew a few of the ropes for his second experience at Randolph. But as time sped by and we got deep into the business of flying our PT-11's and PT-13's the hazing became matter of course and work was everyone's prime concern.

On my first solo flight I was assigned to Lieutenant Haynes, a quiet, thoughtful fellow who made an excellent instructor and, as might have been expected in view of my previous experience, I had no trouble soloing after the required hours at dual controls. Then I was transferred to Lieutenant Day's I Flight with Lieutenant Scott instructing. There we had much older ships, PT-3's, dubbed "box kites" by the cadets, but excellent ships despite their awkward appearance.

Our work in the air and our classwork on the ground seemed easy to me and was intensely interesting. Looking back now I think it was made more so in that it offered escape for hours at a time from the heckling and hazing heaped upon us by the upper classmen in all of our non-working hours. Even at meals we had to be constantly on the alert. The upper classman at the head of the table might suddenly say, "Air raid!" and all the dodos would have to dive under the table. Or he might say, "Gas attack!" and then we'd have to grab our water glass, empty it at a gulp regardless of how full it was, and hold it in our teeth as we crawled under the

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table to trade places with the man who had been across from us. On Thursday nights the dodos were allowed to recite original verses which, if they rhymed, could say anything and everything the author felt like saying about the upper classman at the head of the table. Some of them were classics, but the majority were just plain filthy.

"Flying the mail to Seguin," the local post office, was a popular sport requiring some unlucky dodo to dress himself in a heavy winter flying suit and fly, with arms outstretched and banking on turns, from one upper classman's room to another's inquiring if there was any outgoing mail. When the upper classmen opened their doors to his knock, the dodo had to shield his eyes because all upper classmen were extremely bright. Having gathered the mail, the dodo would then "fly" out of the barracks with his arms flapping like birds' wings and—presumably—continue his flapping all the way into Seguin, a mile away.

After three months as dodos in primary flight training about 50 percent of the September class was approved for further instruction as upper classmen in secondary school. All four of us in bunkroom No. 9 of "B" Barracks—Lang, Chitty, Stone and myself—were promoted, as were Forrest Harsh and another boy whom I had met at Mitchell Field when we were taking our physical exams. "B" Barracks had a pretty good record, in fact, and the boys whom I knew well—Ola, Herbes, Nowak, Caton, Clinkscales—all made the grade.

As upper classmen it became our obligation then to

make things miserable for the new class of dodos that arrived in January, but there were so many men in the new group that a strange situation developed, at least so far as I was concerned. The regular barracks were unable to accommodate them all and temporary quarters were provided for fifty-nine of them on the upper floor of the administration building. I was the upper classman put in charge of this overflow group, and the place became known as "Boys' Town" and I as "Father Genovese." The title appealed to me so much it affected my character, and instead of hazing the daylights out of my charges as the other cadets were doing with theirs—and as I had fully intended to do with my own—I became very protective of them. No other upper classmen were allowed to haze the members of "Boys' Town" while they were in their quarters, and many were the battles Father Genovese engaged in, trying to enforce that rule.

During the last few weeks in April, just before the final tests to determine which of the cadets would be sent on to Kelly Field for advanced training, I went into the worst flying slump of my career. Nerves must have had a great deal to do with it, because my dread of not passing those tests kept me awake night after night and even affected my appetite, which had never been so good as during those first six months at Randolph Field. I lost a lot of weight and developed a tension that made my flying dangerously erratic. Landing a simple, slow-flying training plane became a job I dreaded because I was no longer sure of myself. My classwork didn't seem to suffer,

but my flying really became abominable. And I was still deep in that slump on May 9, 1939, when I went up with Captain Bridgit for my final and crucial check flight.

Bridgit shook his head when he climbed out of the plane half an hour later. "It's no go, Genovese," he said. "Your responses are jerky; you're just a bundle of nerves. I'm sorry, but as far as I'm concerned you're a dangerous flyer."

That was the end, the finish. I was through. The Army had washed me out.

It was hard saying good-by to the boys, packing my bags and straightening up my room, and standing at attention for final inspection as my last official activity at Randolph Field. It was bitter walking down the driveway for the last time, turning at the entrance for a last, heartbreaking view of the training planes lined up on the field; of old "B" Barracks that had been my home in the early months of training. There was a salty taste in my mouth and a burning in my eyes as I stood there looking back, not only at the buildings and the planes on the field but at the past. I thought of that slump I had gone into and wondered miserably how it had come about. I remembered the nights I had lain awake worrying about it, and I recalled Harsh's repeated admonition: "Chin up, kid!" and that short, quick gesture of his—fist and hooked index finger under my jaw. I almost felt that friendly contact then as I stood there, and my chin went up involuntarily. I fastened my eyes on the beautiful, symmetrical facade of the Administration Building—and

for that last instant before I turned and walked away I felt the first surge of a bitterness that was to linger with me through almost six months of self-pity and dissipation in Mexico.

"Chin up, my eye," I thought. "With me it's chin *out*. Stick-your-chin-out Genovese—that's me." And I stuck it out—way out, so that it was an easy target during the next six months for the violent wallop of a strange concoction the Mexicans make out of cactus plants, which they call tequila. Feeling my failure so keenly, I hated to confess it to anyone. I didn't even write home during that dreary and bleary half year in Mexico. And then for no reason that I can assign, but surely by the grace of God, I suddenly lost all taste for liquor and began looking into my state quite soberly. I was still a kid, there were many years of life still ahead of me, and if flying was out as a career there certainly were a lot of others to follow.

That attitude prevailed long enough for me to pack my bags, check out of the hotel in Juarez and strike out for the West Coast. I wouldn't have believed it then, but the fact remains that for the next four years, with only two minor exceptions, I was not to touch another drop of liquor.

When I arrived in San Diego I felt like a new man. As proof of that fact, my first desire when I stepped off the train was to go out to the airport. Standing on the sidelines there an hour or so later I must have looked awfully wistful, because a fellow standing alongside of me in the

little group that had assembled to watch a big airliner take off tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Cheer up, son. Maybe you'll be flying yourself some day."

He was a prosperous-looking man in his early thirties, and there was an energy and exuberance about him that was contagious. I grinned and said, "You never know. Maybe I will."

The stranger pointed to a plane standing alongside the runway, a trim little Stinson cabin job. "There's a nice plane," he said. "Belongs to a friend of mine, Charlie Welstead. Flew down with him from L. A. this morning . . ."

"Wait a minute," I interrupted him. "Did you say Charlie Welstead?"

"I sure did. Why? Do you know him?"

"Do I know him? Good Lord, man, he taught me to fly! Where is he?" I demanded. "Where is that old so-and-so?"

Just then Charlie came out of a hangar a little way down the line and I ran out to meet him. For the next five minutes we stood there laughing and clapping each other on the back, asking one question after another about each other's whereabouts since the last time we met. The replies took a long time; finally we adjourned to the restaurant, and over a round of coffee and rolls we brought ourselves up to date. The man who had so inadvertently brought us together Charlie introduced as Doctor Hartlein, of Los Angeles. Doc was a patient and

untiring listener as Charlie and I talked endlessly about the past.

The first time I saw Charlie Welstead he was climbing out of a wheezy old OX-5 in the middle of a cornfield in Flatbush. I was just a kid at the time, driving a truck for my father on Saturdays, and if Charlie's forced landing hadn't been on a Saturday we would never have met. As it was, I had heard the plane sputtering and coughing for several minutes before it came down. I had pulled the truck off the highway, having stuck my head out of the cab the better to watch the show, and I could see that the only clear space around was the highway itself. There was a fair amount of traffic, however, and Charlie had no alternative but to plunge deep into the cornstalks that spread acre after acre on both sides of the road.

Charlie was a barnstorming pilot at that time. In his rattletrap plane he made the circuit of county fairs and carnivals, taking passengers for five-minute rides at ten dollars apiece—or five, or even two, if he couldn't get ten. And because I was thrilled beyond my wildest dreams at that first chance to talk to a real pilot—especially one who had just made a forced landing!—I ran errands for him the rest of the afternoon, getting gas and tools and oil at the nearest filling station and helping him every way I could to get the plane back into flying condition. He had cracked a bearing—that's what had forced him down—and I thought sure he would be stranded at least for the night. But such things had happened before in Charlie's barnstorming career, so he usually carried a

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couple of spare bearings with him. It was just a matter of taking down the crankcase and fitting in a new one, and because I knew quite a bit about automobile engines I was able to give him considerable help.

My reward was a ride in the plane—after we had towed it out of the cornfield with my father's truck. And from that moment on—I was fifteen at the time—there was only one thing in all the world that I wanted to do. I wanted to fly.

Charlie let me handle the controls of his OX-5 several times that summer, and then, the next year, after he had returned from his circuit of Southern carnivals and fairs, he gave me more lessons. It was only when I was ready to solo that he reneged. "Not in this old Jenny, son," he said. "She has more tricks than a Forty-Second Street blonde and ol' Charlie's the only one that knows 'em all. You go and hire yourself a good airplane for your solo flying." And that's what I did. I joined a flying club. Every Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday I would go out and talk planes with the other "club" members, and at least two or three times every week-end I would get a chance to take the club's trim little Waco training plane up by myself.

In the years between the time Charlie Welstead introduced me to flying and the time I was accepted for training at Randolph Field I made a serious business of learning to fly. Virtually every cent I made doing odd jobs around the stores in our neighborhood, or driving for my father, I put into flying. It cost three dollars per

half hour to fly the cheapest kind of plane, and it cost a lot more to fly good ones—and I spent a lot of time in good ones. It cost money to study advanced navigation at New York University, but the expense was worthwhile because I knew I was building the foundations of an interesting career.

“What are you going to do now, Gen?” Charlie asked me as our coffee grew cold from the constant breeze of conversation across the table. “I hope you aren’t letting your flop at Randolph get you down.”

“No, it hasn’t got me down, Charlie,” I said. “It’s just that I’m not cut out for flying. Ground work is my line.”

Charlie stared at me for a while before he said, “Yeah, I suppose you’re right. You never did have much flyin’ sense.” Then he got up from the table and said, “Well, Doc, how about gettin’ back to L. A.?”

Hartlein agreed. But as they put out their hands to say good-by, I was stunned. I was suddenly the loneliest guy in the world. “Gosh,” I said, “I wish I were going with you.”

It was as easy as that. I got into the plane with them and a few minutes after the take-off Charlie asked me to take the controls. He said he thought the rudder was pulling kind of funny, and what did I think. It seemed okay to me. Well, then, how about the throttle, wasn’t it kind of stiff? No, it felt just about right. Did she go into a right bank as smooth as she should, or wasn’t there something jerky there, like maybe there was play in the aileron wires. No, I didn’t think so. Felt pretty smooth. . . .

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By the time we got up to Los Angeles I had an appointment with Charlie at the Lockheed plant in Burbank the next morning. He was going to introduce me to a friend of his who worked there and who was looking for someone with a lot of practical flying experience. Such a man was needed for a certain job in the production-planning department. It wasn't a flying job, Charlie explained, but then of course I didn't want to get back into flying; I wanted to stay on the ground. . . .

So I went to work for Lockheed. Then I joined a flying club, and agreed to do a little instructing for Charlie on the side at the flying school he had opened up in Glendale—and at the early age of twenty-nine I started to live for the second time.

CHAPTER THREE

Volunteer for the Royal Air Force

IT WAS IN SEPTEMBER of 1940 that I first gave a thought to flying for England. Until then I hadn't known there were jobs available over there, except for English boys or American volunteers who were willing to give up their American citizenship in order to fight for the British.

One of my closest friends at that time was a chap named Louie Dell, who worked with me at Lockheed, and when we left the plant on this particular Saturday afternoon I asked him to drive out to Mines Field with me. I was doing some flying in my spare time for Dr. Howard Norcross, a prominent Los Angeles surgeon, and I knew Doc wouldn't mind if Louie came along with us on our regular Saturday afternoon pleasure flight.

"Not today, Gen," Louie said. "I've got to see a guy in

town. It might be something; I don't know. I'll tell you about it later."

When I got out to the airport Doc Norcross and our mutual friend Doc Hartlein were waiting for me. We piled into Norcross' new cabin plane and went for a ride. We got back about six-thirty and Hartlein suggested that we make a night of it and go to the Coconut Grove for dinner. That meant going home and changing my clothes, and when I got there a message was waiting for me from Louie. He wanted me to call him; he had some news.

I called him but his news was something special; he wanted to get together, not just talk about it over the phone, so I told him to meet us at the Grove and all of us would spend the evening together. Then, on the way downtown in the car after I had picked up Norcross and Hartlein at their homes, a big argument got started one way or another about how much guts it took to make a delayed parachute jump.

Neither of the doctors had ever used a chute and I had, so naturally I did most of the talking. As it turned out my discussion was much too assertive and know-it-all, because by the time we got to our destination I had a bet on my hands.

"All right, Gen," Doc Norcross said. "If you think you know so much about parachuting I'll make a little wager. We'll both go up tomorrow and bail out at five thousand feet, and I'll bet you twenty-five bucks you won't wait till you pass me before pulling your rip cord."

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"Hell, Doc, you might as well pay me now," I said. "No sense in risking your neck on a deal like that."

"If you don't want the bet, just say so," Doc replied. "Don't try to talk me out of my money."

So it was a deal, and we set the time for two o'clock the next afternoon. Then we were at the Coconut Grove and Louie was waiting for us and bubbling all over with this great news of his, so for the rest of the evening the bet was forgotten.

I had never heard of the Clayton Knight Committee until Louie mentioned it, but it turned out that the committee's purpose was to recruit American pilots to fly for the Air Transport Auxiliary of the R.A.F. in England.

"There's a fellow named Benway—Captain Benway—representing the Committee here in L. A.," Louie said. "He's staying at the Hollywood-Roosevelt and he told me today he's getting applications by the score."

"What's the job?" I asked. "What does the Air Transport Auxiliary do?"

"It's the Ferry Command for the R.A.F. in the British Isles," Louie said. "The planes the British are building and the ones we're sending them—they all have to be flown from the factories and assembly points to the Air Force bases where they are needed. For instance, we send over a shipload of bombers and they are delivered at Liverpool. They're assembled by maintenance units there, and then these A.T.A. pilots climb in and fly them maybe to Scotland or to Wales or to southern England or wherever they're needed most."

"Hell," I said, "an American would have to give up his citizenship to do that. It's flying for the Royal Air Force."

Louie shook his head. "No, it's a civilian proposition. The pilots are paid \$600 a month on a one-year contract. It's a strictly business affair. They don't give up their American citizenship because they aren't technically in the armed forces and don't have to take a pledge of allegiance to the king, or anything like that. The only thing is, the Germans don't examine a pilot's contract before starting to shoot at him, so every now and then they shoot down a plane that's in transit. Being civilians, of course, the A.T.A. pilots can't defend themselves. They fly without guns . . ."

I slept late Sunday morning, the day after the party, but I woke up thinking about Captain Benway and the A.T.A. I thought about the thing all through breakfast, and I would have thought about it all afternoon if I hadn't suddenly remembered at 1:00 P.M. that I had twenty-five bucks to collect from Doc Norcross a few minutes after 2:00. I called Doc to see if he remembered and he had already left for the airport, so I got dressed, piled into my car and drove out to Mines Field.

Doc had engaged a plane and a pilot by the time I got there; he also had arranged for two parachutes and a chute expert to go along with us to check our stuff before we jumped. I had expected Doc to be looking a little green around the gills, but he looked completely confident and a darn sight cockier than I felt. I had never before made a delayed jump, and I was beginning to

wish I had listened to myself more closely the night before when I was telling the boys how easy it was.

At five thousand feet the pilot put the plane in position—it was a Stinson cabin job, and we had had the door removed before we took off—and I said, “Okay, Doc, I’ll be waiting for you when you get down there. Go ahead and jump.”

Even then he didn’t show any nervousness. Not until he was on the step with the wind tearing at his clothes and nothing between him and Mother Earth but five thousand feet of fresh air and sunshine did he start to hesitate. I had been waiting for that; I promptly gave him a hard tap on the shoulder and down he went. He pulled the rip cord instantly, his chute popped open and then he was swinging gently back and forth, settling slowly toward the ground.

It was my turn then, and I had to be sure I passed him before pulling my rip cord. I couldn’t count on seeing him as I shot downward, so I planned to keep my hands at my sides until I had counted ten, then reach for the cord and with slow dignity release the chute.

Those plans went off very well, except that when I lifted my right hand to find the rip cord at my chest, I found myself reaching way up over my head. It was a terrific job to get my hand down again and to locate the release. By then I was getting dizzy from the scream of the air as it rushed past me. The jerk on my harness when the big sheet ballooned out above me was something terrific, much as I braced myself against it. I had reached

my terminal velocity, was traveling downward at a speed that couldn't have increased no matter how much farther I fell, and I was only one thousand feet above the ground when the chute opened.

When I got my breath and the dizziness began to clear from my brain, I glanced around and spotted Doc Norcross. He was at about fifteen hundred feet smoking a cigarette. "Come on down, Doc!" I yelled at him. "I'm not going to wait around for you all day."

"The hell you won't—for twenty-five bucks!" Doc shouted back.

That's what got me thinking again of Captain Benway and the A.T.A. "I could be ferrying planes for England, making six hundred berries a month, and doing a real job in this war," I thought, "and here I am risking my neck to win a lousy twenty-five dollar bet."

I saw Benway the next day, told him about my flying experience and the work I was doing at that time in production-planning and engineering at Lockheed's plant in Burbank. He was much interested and said that if I'd go to New York and apply directly to the Clayton Knight Committee at the Waldorf Astoria he felt sure I would be accepted immediately.

I talked with Charlie Welstead and Louie several times before finally giving notice at Lockheed; they both agreed that the proposition was a honey. Louie would have tried to go if he hadn't already applied to the Army Air Corps. And Charlie would have gone, I'm sure, if it hadn't been for the fact that he had a lot of

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money tied up in his flying school and the investment was only then beginning to pay off.

Ten days after seeing Benway I was on my way East in a United Airlines plane, happy as a lark and rarin' to get overseas. But I hadn't counted on my family and what they would have to say when they met me at La Guardia Airport next morning.

"Now wait a minute, Cappy," my brother Sal said, gripping my shoulder just as he used to do when I was a kid. "Can't you see there has to be a catch in that deal somewhere? Why would the British pay you six hundred a month to fly planes for them if there wasn't a lot of danger connected with the job? That's big dough, and if the work is as easy as you seem to think it is, why aren't the Britishers doing it themselves?"

I argued that the only Britishers available for such jobs were those too old to fly for the R.A.F., and that there weren't enough old-timers to fill the bill, but Mother and Dad and Sal still stuck to their guns. "Wait until your own country gets into the war, Cappy," Sal said. "Boys like you will be needed here then."

"But the Army washed me out. They don't want me. They say I'm a dangerous flier."

"All right," he replied, "and maybe they know what they're talking about. In England you'd be flying in a combat area. You'd be flying unarmed planes—and for what? Not to defend your own country, but to defend somebody else's country! And what good is six hundred

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dollars a month or six thousand a month, for that matter, if you never get back here to enjoy it?"

The debate lasted two days before we finally came to a compromise. I agreed to take a job that I had been offered at Brewster Aircraft in New York and to work there for a few months. One of my brother's arguments that had carried considerable weight was that in England I would be sure to do a lot of instrument flying because the weather there was consistently bad, and if I was determined to go across, the sensible thing to do was to get some experience on instruments. I knew Sal was right on that score, so during the seven months I worked for Brewster I did all the blind flying I could on week-ends and during every spare hour away from the plant.

It was on July 7, 1941, that the New York papers carried the headline story of the occupation of Iceland by our troops, and I knew as I read the report of President Roosevelt's message to Congress announcing the move that we were in the war whether we admitted it or not; that flying for Britain from then on would be the same as flying for the United States because we were all in the same boat; and I went down to the Clayton Knight Committee offices the next morning and signed up to fly for the A.T.A. A week later, armed with my passport and the Committee's okay, I took the train for Montreal.

The Newark baseball team was staying at the Queens Hotel in Montreal. When I stepped up to the desk to register the clerk apologized for the racket that billowed out of the cocktail lounge and clattered all over the

lobby. "It isn't anything serious," he explained. "Just the Newark baseball team."

Maybe the noise wasn't serious, but drinking among those lads certainly was. It was intriguing, too, and after I had parked my bags in the room and washed up a bit I drifted into the bar to see what went.

There were about twenty boys in there who were having a wonderful time. They had taken the place over, American style. When I pushed through the swinging doors I was welcomed with a chorus of off-key cheers and a good half-dozen offers of drinks. It was no time to be on the wagon, but that's where I was and that's where I stayed.

As it happened, however, I wasn't the only outsider who had been attracted to the bar by sounds of frivolity. Clinging determinedly to one of the stools was another non-baseballer whose name I was soon told was Privensal.

"He's a pilot, an airplane pilot, this gent right here," a boy called Buck informed me. "Know what he's goin' to do? He's goin' to Englan'—goin' to get all messed up right in the thick o' stuff! What'ya think o' that, huh, what do ya?"

All I thought about that was: Brother, I'm sure glad to run into this guy. I shook Privensal's hand so hard he didn't know what to make of it until I told him that I was going to England, too. The announcement slid off Pri like water from a duck's back but his indifference didn't alter my attitude toward him. He was something to

hang onto—and the farther I got away from home, the deeper I moved into this ferrying business that I had contracted for, the gladder I was to find company.

Everybody in the world ought to have a friend like Al Privensal. It would be good for their nerves and their digestion and their outlook on life. He just plain didn't give a damn. No matter what the circumstances at any given time, his attitude was always: so what? If he wanted a drink, he took it. If he wanted ten drinks, he took them—and maybe a couple more to boot. If he had to get up next morning for an important meeting, all right, he would get up—if he felt like it.

I've only known one other fellow quite like him, and that is Al Gingiss, a Chicago boy whom I met in England and later flew with in China. He and I were on the safari in India when we captured three leopard cubs, and it was while we were bringing the cubs back to this country that I saw him for the first time really take his hair down—when he cried like a baby and lost all vestige of the blasé indifference that was so integral a part of his character at all other times.

When I took Al Privensal by the arm and led him out of the bar that first night in Montreal I was beginning to be a little doubtful as to whether I had made a wise move in tying in so close with this chap. I mean, he wasn't just quietly intoxicated; he was uproariously drunk. And having the time of his life.

"Hi, there, gals! Jus' call me Pri!" he bellowed at a couple of females getting into the elevator in the lobby,

and I had trouble making him realize that they were over fifty years old. Finally convinced on that score, he wheeled around to look over the rest of the field. It was nearly three in the morning when I finally threw him into his bed and fell into mine. I hated to think of the appointment each of us had at the Ferry Command headquarters the next morning.

A pitcher of ice water has a startling effect upon a hangover. I know this because I tried it on Privensal at 7:00 A.M. next day and saw the rage of a lion spread over a face that had been utterly devoid of any expression except stupor an instant before. He would have torn me to pieces if I hadn't made a lightning retreat, and yet when I knocked on the door a half hour later he was feeling almost pretty good. That was the first time I used ice water on Privensal, but it wasn't the last.

On the way over to the Ferry Command offices in the building of the *Montreal Star* I was trying to figure a genteel way of putting the bite on whoever I would have to see for an advance on my salary. A couple of times I thought of mentioning the problem to Privensal, but it didn't seem advisable. I was afraid he might think I was trying to nick him, and from the way he had been throwing money around the night before I knew he wasn't in any such embarrassing position as I. So it was with a feeling not only of surprise but of relief of a sort when, as we stepped out of the elevator and headed for the door marked "Royal Air Force Air Transport Auxil-

iary," I heard Privensal say: "I hope these beggars keep the purse strings loose. I'm broke!"

We got our advances—there was no trouble about it at all as it turned out—and we were told to be at Rockcliffe Airport in Ottawa on the morning of the fifteenth for our check flights. After that, if we were okayed, we would be sent to England.

Al Privensal had had a lot of flying experience in the States, and he was a thoroughly competent pilot. In fact, he had surplus ability, and I know that for a fact, because when he flew that check flight at Ottawa the morning after the night of the fourteenth he wasn't really Al Privensal—he was only what was left of that guy after Scotch and soda had finished with him. Maybe it was the ice water again, I don't know, but when it brought him out of bed at seven that morning, he had had two hours' sleep. Nevertheless, he went out to the field, stepped into a BT-9 and put on as nice a performance of slow rolls, spins to right and left, one-turn spins, and chandelles as I've ever seen. Flight Lieutenant Costellotti (who incidentally was private pilot for the Canadian Air Marshal, Billy Bishop) put Pri and me through all the paces, even forced landings when Costellotti suddenly cut the power and told us to pick our spots, and Privensal came through 100 per cent.

At nine o'clock the following night, back in Montreal, we got word that our plane would take off for England at 6:45 A.M. the next morning.

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"We'll have time to pack and get in seven or eight hours sleep," I said, grabbing my suitcase.

"Sleep? What do you mean?" Privensal was already slipping on his suit coat. "This is our last night in America, Gen! This calls for a celebration."

"The hell it does," I said. "I'm going to pack, and then I'm going to get some sleep."

"Well, I'll be damned if I'll pack alone," Privensal said, and he went out and slammed the door.

It couldn't have been ten minutes later when his key rattled in the door and in he walked with two of the slickest-looking little dolls I've ever seen.

"They're going to help us pack," Pri said, laughing jubilantly. "Isn't that swell?"

CHAPTER FOUR

London Blitz

THE SUN was very slowly coming up out of the east the morning of July 19, 1941, when Al Privensal and I stepped out of the R.A.F. station wagon at Dorval Field alongside the big gray B-24 waiting there to carry us across the North Atlantic to England. All the rest that we had done—signing in at the A.T.A. headquarters in Montreal, taking the check flight at Ottawa—that all seemed completely preliminary now, although at the time those details seemed milestones on our road to service in England. But this was really it.

There she stood, that big, fat-bellied, four-engined giant, props spinning and a full-throated roar coming from her. The dew made a silver sheet across the field and the night's chill was still in the air.

"It's not that cold," Privensal said.

I laughed, realizing suddenly that I was shivering all over. Pri was standing there indifferent to everything, his hands in his pockets, a cigarette dangling from his lips. The other passengers who had come out with us in the station wagon and who were now standing around the plane in tight little groups were more like myself in their reactions.

"That Scotch you were drinking all night is all that's keeping you warm," I said. "Look at that submarine commander over there—the guy they called Captain Conway. He's shivering like a dog."

It was true. Conway was a powerfully built, red-faced man quite impressive in his uniform; but the hand he waved around as he asked questions about the plane was trembling like a leaf. An impressive-looking man named McDougal, a member of the Canadian Parliament, stood talking to a couple of British Foreign-Office men—Cockburn and Howe were their names. McDougal laughed at something Howe said—and right at the tail end of the laugh there was a very definite quiver. Cockburn took a long pull on his cigar, and then, apparently forgetting he had just lit the thing, threw it away. He stared at the plane for a moment, then his head jerked around to look at the fine big cigar burning there in the dirt. He shook his head and cursed under his teeth.

In a couple of minutes Captain O. P. Jones, who was to fly us across, came from the administration building with his passenger list, log books and other paraphernalia. He checked each of us individually, looking over

our credentials and passports and asking questions about what we were taking with us—guns, explosives, and so forth.

When he had finished with all of us there was a moment of strained silence as he completed the notations in his book. Then Privensal said in a loud voice, "A screwy business, if you ask me. Captain Jones knows all about us, but we don't know nothin' about him—and he's flying us across!" There was a burst of laughter all around and the strain was fairly well broken.

When I bought my little leather-bound, cover-locking diary in Montreal the afternoon following our check flights at Ottawa, I had gone back to the hotel and written its first words: "We took off from Dorval Field just outside Montreal at — o'clock in the morning, July —." Now as Captain Jones and his co-pilot thundered the big B-24 down the runway and lifted her into the air, I took out my pen and filled in the blanks. It was 7:30 in the morning, July 19, 1941—and we were on our way to England. The diary puts it a little more colorfully:

"We swept into the air and climbed steadily on a southwest course for about two minutes. Then we swung around to the northeast, gently banking and getting a thrilling last glimpse of Montreal as the sprawling city began to stir in the morning sunlight . . ."

That was too poetic a pace to keep for long and in the weeks and months that followed the diary became a very matter-of-fact affair. Even the balance of the trans-Atlantic trip was noted quite briefly. We made two stops

before hitting out over the open sea, the last one at Gander, Newfoundland, at eight o'clock that night; and then for nine and a half hours of moonlight flight, holding to an altitude of about 10,000 feet, we saw no more of land.

I was asleep most of the time during the crossing, but Al Privensal, true to his usual form of staying up all night whenever he could, was wide awake. Of course, he had been asleep most of the day on the trip over eastern Canada and Newfoundland. He put his hand on my arm about midnight and roused me. "A convoy, Gen," he said. "You ought to see it."

McDougal, the M.P., and the two Foreign-Office men were asleep and nobody roused them, figuring they had probably seen such things often enough before. But Captain Conway needed no rousing; he had his face pressed against the cabin window as if he wanted to see every deck plank on each of the twenty-two ships spread out over the moonlit sea below us.

"They're keeping perfect formation," Conway said admiringly. "Good protection, too. They could have had six more bottoms for an escort as strong as that."

Privensal and I could make out a couple of destroyers riding at either side of the mass of merchant ships, but Conway pointed out three corvettes and a pair of subchasers that we hadn't identified.

We had left the convoy far behind when half an hour later Privensal roused me again, this time to point out a pair of big Lockheed-Hudson bombers flying in formation on the course for England. We were making slightly

better speed than they were, so we could see them for a few minutes only while they were in the direct light of the moon.

Just before dawn, and about a hundred miles off the coast of Ireland, we saw another convoy, considerably smaller than the first and heading in the opposite direction; toward Canada, Conway said, and undoubtedly out of Liverpool, judging by the route it was taking.

It was a thrill seeing land again after those long hours over the Atlantic, but as we looked out of the plane and saw Northern Ireland slip away behind us I was surprised that it was so much like American countryside when seen from the sky. The fields may have been a shade greener, but I think that was mostly my imagination. As a landscape it was different only in that the roads were of dirt instead of concrete, and the fields marked by fences and hedgerows were smaller.

Scotland, after we had left land for a few minutes and swept across the North Channel of the Irish Sea, appeared much as I had expected it would; hillier than northern Ireland, rougher in terrain and less cultivated, with deep green marshes in the lowlands and broad, brownish moors stretching for miles from the foothills of small mountain ranges to the rocky coasts of the sea. But over south-central Scotland the landscape changed slowly into a countryside of farms and meadows. Sheep and cattle could be seen grazing in the fields, and the whole land seemed prosperous and happy, beautiful and at peace with the world. It didn't seem possible that

we were in a combat area, but we definitely were. The fact was brought home quite clearly as we circled the field at Prestwick, on the southwestern border of Scotland, and saw a battery of antiaircraft guns fully manned and ready for action in case the spotters over whom we had been passing had let an enemy plane slip through.

Officials of the Air Transport Auxiliary took Privensal and me in tow as soon as we stepped off the plane. They had tickets for us on the train that left for Glasgow at noontime. We would arrive there around four o'clock, they explained, and our tickets for the nine o'clock London train would be waiting for us at the station.

"You gents don't fool around," Pri remarked, and one of the A.T.A. men, a dried-up old fellow with stringy gray hair, fixed him with a very sour glance.

"Aye, laddie, we've a war to fight over here," he said.

Pri didn't bother to explain that we both were anxious to get going in this ferrying business, and that it was a promising sign indeed to have everything set for us the moment we landed on British soil. In the weeks that followed we were often to look back on that first contact with the A.T.A. in Prestwick and wonder where along the line the need for speed had abruptly vanished.

I had my first crumpets and tea on the train that night going from Glasgow to London, and for their favorite national repast I think the British have been much too easily satisfied. No matter how long I lived in England, I am sure I could always, with perfect self-control, take crumpets or leave them alone.

Privensal and I were met at the train the next morning by a man wearing the navy blue uniform of the Air Transport Auxiliary. He introduced himself as Captain Thackeroy, and his good nature and eagerness added much to the good impression we had already been given of the A.T.A. He took us to breakfast at the Mayfair Hotel, where we were put up during our two-day stay in London. That breakfast, incidentally, gave us our first contact with food rationing. We had to wait twenty minutes to get a table, and then we had neither sugar on our cereal, nor butter on our toast. When I muttered something critical about these absences, Pri repeated what he'd been so sharply told in Prestwick: "Aye, laddie—we've a war to fight over here, we havel"

If there had been any doubts in our minds about the seriousness of the German blitz on England, it was thoroughly erased during that first day of sightseeing in London. It was hard to imagine what the city might have looked like before, so widespread was the wreckage and rubble everywhere we turned.

"That was the House of Commons," Thackeroy said, pointing to a broken hulk of a building that looked much like pictures of ancient ruins I had seen in my high-school history books. And then again, indicating several acres of disordered bricks and wooden beams, "That was a row of fashionable apartments. The casualties all over the city were terrible that night. You might have read about the hundreds of men and women killed in a direct hit on

a bomb shelter in the theater district—that was the same night.”

About eleven o'clock on our second night in London Pri and I were sitting at the Mayfair bar when the air-raid sirens began to scream. I started to get off my stool, quite willing to abandon my ginger ale and get into a shelter. Privensal, however, had more to lose, having just ordered a fresh Scotch and soda.

“Take it easy, Gen,” he said. “I don't see anybody else moving out.”

I glanced around and was surprised to find that he was right. There were probably forty people in the room, a good two-thirds of them, both men and women, in uniform. The only ones who left their table were an old man and his frail, gray-haired little wife. Everyone else remained where they were at the tables and along the bar, and it didn't seem to me that there was the slightest lessening of conversation or laughter.

The bartender grinned as I settled myself back on the bar stool. “They take their chances on the first ones,” he said, and I gradually realized he was talking about the first bombs. “If they're fallin' at the other end of town there's no sense our bein' in the dugouts. And if they're fallin' close by—well, some of 'em will sit right where they are anyway, figurin' it ain't so bad to kick off with a glass o' good whiskey in their hand.”

It happened that the bombs did fall at “the other end of town” that time, and although the blackout was complete and the warning screams of the sirens went on for

half an hour, punctuated every few seconds with the booming explosions of incendiary and demolition bombs, we and the scores of other guests continued to sit at the bar and sip our drinks as if nothing were happening at all. There were at least fifty bombs dropped on London that night, but the morning papers relegated the account of the raid to a small space at the bottom of page one. There had been "slight enemy activity" over the city during the night and "several" bombs were dropped. No casualties had been reported. My diary carries the cryptic comment: "I guess you can get used to anything."

On the train out of London the next day, on our way to the A.T.A. training center near Maidenhead, we saw more bomb-ruined areas; and Privensal, in a peculiarly thoughtful mood, remarked that London would be a lush spot for a contractor and builder after the war. "You can do that," I said, remembering the buildings I had seen torn down one after the other in New York and Los Angeles the past few years. "Me, I'll just take a broom and a dustpan and open up a string of parking lots."

An A.T.A. station wagon met the train at Maidenhead and drove us out to the White Waltham Airdrome which was the headquarters pool for the entire air transport program as well as the training base for new pilots. It was a large field, roughly three-quarters of a mile long and half a mile wide; its surface was smooth lawn as trim and neat as a golf-course fairway. Its south and west borders were marked by rows of trees, and the north edge, paralleling a railroad track, accommodated a row

of hangars, the administration building, control tower and canteen. On the east border were close rows of training planes, and in various other parts of the field Thackeroy pointed out bombers and fighters and twin-engined ships of different types, all of which, he said, were used in training pilots so that they would be able to handle every type of ship used by the R.A.F.

It was only a matter of a few days but it seemed like months since I had heard a good old Yankee accent—besides Privensal's, of course—so it was like a home-coming to walk into the pilots' lounge in the administration building and find a game of poker going on to the tune of standard American curses and wisecracks. All six players hailed us, dropping their cards as we approached, and in a matter of minutes all eight of us had each other pretty well identified.

"Julius Petach," one fellow said as he stuck out his hand and grinned. "From McKeesport, Pennsylvania."

Petach introduced the rest of the boys: Larry King of San Francisco, a gray-haired, thin fellow about forty years old who had flown in the first world war; "Pappy" Mills, at forty-four the oldest of the boys based at White Waltham. He was from New York and is now a major in the Army Air Force. Another was Lee Garlow, a tall, handsome, curly-headed fellow with a trim black mustache, who, before coming to England, had made several pictures in Hollywood. Then there was Gilson Jacobson, a big, poker-faced, good-natured lad from Washington,

D. C. The sixth was E. W. Coe, a soft-spoken, nearly bald youngster from Wisconsin.

Later in the evening of that first day at White Waltham, Jacobson—"Ole Jake"—came around to the rooms where we had been billeted and, sprawling himself out in a big armchair, proceeded to give us the dope on the curriculum for new pilots.

"You don't do any flying over here," he explained, "until you've convinced everybody from the King on down that you know the first and last name of every nut and bolt on the lowliest training plane on the field. Then they let you go up—but only for a few minutes. When you come down you go to school some more. You learn the most intimate secrets of the second lowliest training plane, and after a while you take that up.

"That goes on for ages, and then you are given an endless series of what they call 'familiarity flights.' You learn the color, size and rate of growth of every blade of grass in southern England; then you cover northern England, eastern England, and western England. Then you learn about Scotland.

"After that, providing the war isn't over, you will be introduced to various types of single-motor planes. And if, after a long course of instruction with them, you prove that you can take them from one place to another like a nice pilot should, then you can expect to be promoted to the twin-engine pool. If you are still youthful enough to fly airplanes when you've finished that course," he con-

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cluded, "then you'll probably qualify as a pilot in the Air Transport Auxiliary."

Late one afternoon during our first two weeks at Maidenhead a lone German bomber swept in over the field, dropping three bombs. A Hurricane fighter on the field was damaged and one hangar took a direct hit—but it was the first action we had seen and most of us loved it. We saw the Jerry coming in because the sirens had screamed a warning; we saw the bombs drop, saw the lone Hurricane shiver as one of them blasted a hole in the field about fifty feet away; then we saw the hangar shudder and collapse with scraps of metal and wood flying out of its roof. And then, seemingly before the sound of the explosions had died away, there was a multiple roar at the far end of the field and two Spitfires shot out of a beautifully camouflaged nowhere, raced one behind the other down the field, and took off after the raider.

That was a real show, even though it lasted only about three minutes. The bomber had come in on us from the west and was leveled out and streaking east before the two Spitfires were off the ground. But they had twice his speed; he made a beautiful target with the sun at his back; and he had taken enough altitude so that one Spitfire could go in under him and the other over. We watched the Spitfires gain on him, holding our breath and praying they wouldn't get out of sight before the finish—and they didn't.

They were small on the horizon when the end came;

just three spots, one above the other. Then, with perfect coordination, the spot on top began to go down and the spot on the bottom began to come up. We couldn't hear the chatter of the guns as the Spitfires poured lead into the belly and the roof of Jerry's bomber, but we saw their perpendicular pincer attack in all its glory; and suddenly, as though someone had touched a match to it, the bomber was an expanding spot of smoke run through from top to bottom with flame. And then it was a plunging comet—abandoned to its fate by the two Spitfires. It was against all regulations, of course, but after those two Britishers swept in over the field, dipping their wings in a victory roll, they put on one of the finest stunt shows I have ever seen.

The training pool at White Waltham was a point of interest for distinguished visitors to England during the Battle of Britain, and on one occasion while I was there young King Peter of Yugoslavia dropped in to look us over. He was a funny-looking kid with a thin face and a big nose and a very much over-sized regal manner. Hauteur was written all over him—quite in contrast to the manner of his hosts, King George and Queen Elizabeth. Except for the British King's uniform, handsomely embellished that day with medals and ribbons and yards of gold braid, you might have thought they were any ordinary British couple. They smiled and nodded at the boys, making a great effort—and quite successfully, too—to put everyone at ease.

All the boys in the training pool were lined up on the

field, stiff as starch in their freshly pressed uniforms. It made a nice show, too. The A.T.A. dress uniforms were a deep blue, a couple of shades darker than the U. S. Navy's slate-colored outfits, and expertly tailored. We lined up at rigid attention for the first few minutes, and then, after some formal chitchat between the royal guests and our top officers, Commodore Gerard D'Erlanger and Captain Wills, King George said that he would like to meet each of the pilots individually.

The King and Queen and the little King started down the line, shaking each man's hand as D'Erlanger intoned the introductions: "Captain Genovese—His Majesty King George, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, His Majesty King Peter. . . . Captain Privensal—His Majesty King George, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, His Majesty King Peter . . ." And as hands were shaken all around, King George would say, "What part of America are you from, Captain? Ah, yes, Indiana—a wonderful state, etc., etc."

The entourage moved down the line and everyone was absurdly on edge, their voices catching as they answered the dull little questions, their smiles stiff and humorless as wax dummies'. But when Captain Gilson Jacobson was introduced he managed to break the ice completely.

"Captain Jacobson—His Majesty King George, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, His Majesty King Peter," D'Erlanger droned as they paused before the tall, poker-faced boy from Washington, D. C. Jake put out his big

paw, grasped King George's hand in a mighty squeeze and said in a great, booming voice: "I beg your pardon, sir—I didn't quite catch the name."

Silence dropped over the gathering like a black fog, and the royal jaws hung limp with amazement. And then the Adam's apple in King George's rather longish throat began to bob up and down and a laugh burst from his lips. He turned to the Queen and found her white-faced but shaking with laughter. Commodore D'Erlanger accepted the royal precedent and so did all the rest of us—and from there on the review was a matter of actual fun.

Gil Jacobson was nothing of a clown, but I think he had as typical a sense of American humor as anyone I've ever met. He was completely natural and unaffected, and the combination of Americanism with that kind of honest naturalness is bound, particularly in a place like England, to result in a lot of humor.

Gil was a guest at Lady Astor's swank estate on one occasion while he was billeted at "Aide" Manor and his hostess proved her own Americanism to be as blunt as his. It was cold and wet the Sunday he dropped over to Henley-on-the-Thames to see first hand the much-talked-about "open house" entertainment which Lady Astor provided every Sunday for American boys in the Ferry Command. By the time he had ridden the fifteen miles from White Waltham to Lady Astor's front door he was thoroughly chilled and desperately eager for a long pull at some Scotch or Bourbon. No one had told him that Lady Astor was a light-wine and beer partisan who

never allowed anything stronger to be served in her house.

After nosing around among the buffet tables for a few minutes and finding nothing more stimulating than some pale sauterne, Gil began to comment audibly that what he wanted was a *drink*. "I'm cold," he told the butler rather peevishly. "I'm cold and I need a drink." The butler impassively offered him sauterne—for the third or fourth time—and Gil turned away to seek someone in higher authority.

Directly behind him he found Lady Astor, looking very lovely and smiling with the warmth of an old friend.

"Hello, Captain," Lady Astor said. "It's so good to have you with us. This is your first visit, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," Gil replied, and then returned to the matter most on his mind. But delicately. "It certainly is cold today, Lady Astor. I'm chilled clear through."

Lady Astor nodded, smiling cheerfully at Gil and at the ladies with her. "It certainly is, Captain," she said. "You should have thought to wear your red woolies." She squeezed his hand graciously and walked away.

CHAPTER FIVE

Crash Landing—Alracobra P-39

WHEN COMMODORE GERARD D'ERLANGER, prominent British financier and sportsman, organized the Air Transport Auxiliary in the early part of 1940 during the German blitz on England, his intention was to reduce the tragic loss of planes in transit. The Royal Air Force, during the time it picked up its planes at assembly points and delivered them by its own pilots to fighter and bomber airdromes, was crashing or otherwise damaging 60 per cent of such new equipment. Only four out of every ten planes built or received in England were getting into the air to fight off the invader at the time D'Erlanger founded the A.T.A., but by the Spring of 1942, slightly more than a year later, ninety-nine out of every hundred new planes were being delivered to the R.A.F. in one piece and ready for battle.

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D'Erlanger's accomplishment was one of those things that "couldn't be done." The best pilots in England, people said, were in the R.A.F.; if they couldn't do the transporting job, certainly the over-age men and the women pilots that D'Erlanger was banding together couldn't do it either. The Commodore thought otherwise. He knew that the terrain and weather conditions of the British Isles were far more familiar to scores of middle-aged sportsmen pilots in England than they were to the youngsters doing their first flying for the R.A.F. Many of these private pilots had been flying before the youngsters of the R.A.F. were born. With a special training program to familiarize them with military planes—bombers, fighters, pursuits—he believed and finally proved that they were excellently qualified to handle the transport job. A further advantage to his plan was that hundreds of R.A.F. pilots were released for active war duty in the air.

As the A.T.A. expanded it was necessary to take on a great many pilots whose experience would never have qualified them for the job when the program was first begun. At White Waltham I encountered boys in training who hadn't even had commercial pilots' licenses in civilian life. This was true of some of the Americans as well as of the Britishers. And in more than one case the reason was that they were physically disqualified for such licenses; the use of one arm or one leg might be limited, or their eyes might not be quite up to par. But they made good A.T.A. fliers because they spent months

—sometimes nearly a year—in intensive training before they were given any important delivery jobs. They flew all over England with instructors, learning from maps and personal instruction the location of every secret air base, the course of every river, the nature of balloon barrages, the special significance of hundreds of various landmarks.

So far as I was concerned—because I had had my transport license even before I went to Randolph Field—much of that training was a waste of time. The familiarity flights were vital, of course, and the three weeks I spent on them were invaluable to me later, but the endless instruction in training planes and in navigation was a terrible bore. I had been in England two months before I was given my navigation check-out flight, and I still hadn't touched my finger to an important plane. When I was told after being passed on the navigation test that I would then be assigned to a training pool where I would be given more instruction on how to fly each of these special types of planes, I decided to hell with the whole business.

The man to see was Captain Hill, and I went to him in something of a lather. I had come over here to do something useful, to fly planes to British bases where they would be used in the war, I told him. I hadn't come all the way to England just to go to flying school, and if I was going to have to go through that six-month training period learning every part of every British plane's personality, I was going home.

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Hill was very decent about it, and more than cordial. When I told him I had flown twin-engined planes in the United States, he took the bull by the horns and overrode regulations, putting me directly into the A.T.A.'s twin-engine course. That was completed in two weeks, then I was assigned to the pool at Kirkbride, on the Scottish border, to do some real business delivering planes from there to whatever R.A.F. base in England needed them most.

Just a few days before I was transferred from White Waltham, two other pilots and I were given planes to be delivered to Preston, up north of Liverpool on the west coast of England. I drew a Hurricane, the other boys, Frank Conners of Indianapolis and another American lad from Gloucester, Virginia, whom I knew only as "The Deacon," had Miles Masters, which were about the first planes built in England with plywood fuselage and wings.

Shortly after we took off, The Deacon (who had been a preacher before joining the A.T.A.) found that the hood of his plane was jammed in some way and would neither close nor open the way it should. The weather was not too good and the indications were that it would be worse the farther north we went, so, after tinkering for a couple of minutes and getting nowhere, The Deacon pulled the emergency release and the hood went over the side. If he was going to have to jump for any reason he didn't want a jammed hood standing in his way. But the flurry of air in the cockpit, as the hood ripped away

snatched the map out of The Deacon's lap and carried it over the side, too.

If he had been alone and lost his map he would have turned around and gone back for another, because our route took us through the Liverpool Corridor—and there's no more dangerous stunt in flying than trying to go through a balloon barrage without knowing exactly where you are.

The so-called "corridor" is a passage about two and one-half miles wide separating the balloon barrage surrounding Liverpool from the one surrounding Warrington. The cities themselves are about ten miles apart, with Liverpool on the coast and its balloon cables starting well inland and stretching a couple of miles out to sea. Warrington, an important manufacturing district, was just as well protected with balloons anchored a few hundred yards apart all through the city and for several miles around.

To a pilot a balloon barrage means sudden death unless he flies well above the gas bags, which are at the top of seven-thousand-foot steel cables, or goes through certain designated passages at a lower level. As ferry pilots we were not supposed to fly by instruments, and it was rare in England to have a ceiling of more than two or three thousand feet. Consequently, we always used the Liverpool Corridor.

I had seen The Deacon jettison his hood and I saw the map go overside, so I signaled him to follow me. He agreed and fell into formation. Conners, on the other

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hand, had to stop at the Hawarden Airdrome to refuel, so he beat it on ahead, hitting top speed with the intention of getting back into the air in time to finish the flight with us.

The ceiling had been twenty-five hundred feet when we left Worcester, but by the time we were over Chester, a little northeast of Hawarden, there was practically no visibility at all, even at eight hundred feet. Had I been flying alone I would have gone on through the Corridor, but I didn't like having the responsibility of The Deacon on my shoulders. I signaled him to turn around and we headed back toward Hawarden, hoping to find Conners still there and tell him not to take off. We were too late. The officer in charge told us he had taken off just five minutes before.

"He'll come back," The Deacon said. "Nobody could get through that soup—even with a map." His voice was shaky. I hadn't realized what a strain it would be, flying virtually blind through the stuff that we had been in, and depending for your directions on a fellow you scarcely knew and who still was not a full-fledged ferry pilot.

I thought the same thing—that Conners would turn around and come back. The fog was thickening all the time and the ground markings or check points pointing out the path through the corridor would scarcely be visible by then, even at four or five hundred feet. But Conners didn't come back, and the next we heard from him was an hour later when he called from Squires Gate Air-

drome at Blackpool, some few miles north of the corridor, to say that he was laid up with a damaged wing.

"Damaged?" the officer at the desk said. "What do you mean? How did you damage it?"

"I hit the rim of the balloon barrage," Conners explained, "and the right wing cut a cable. It's nothing serious, but the old bus needs a little patching."

"Did you say you *cut a cable*?" the astounded officer demanded. "What the hell were you flying—a cleaver?"

Conners didn't know the answer to that and neither did the rest of us until some time later when the mechanics solved the puzzle. Plywood planes just weren't built to cut steel cables, but Conners' plane had done it by striking the line with a center-section connecting bolt at the root of his right wing. Had it hit half an inch to either right or left of that exact spot the wing would have been sliced completely off and Conners wouldn't have had a chance in a million of coming out of the crash alive. "Cable-cutting Conners" really earned his nickname.

I got into trouble in the Liverpool barrage once myself several months after Conners' experience, and it taught me a great respect for the American-made Bell Airacobra I was flying, one of the first such planes to be delivered in England. It was the fact that I had that particular type of plane that got me into the jam, so maybe I shouldn't be too grateful to its high-powered Allison engine for saving my life. In any event, I was doing a little stunt flying on the way down from Kirkbride to Lichfield that day—it was the kind of plane that a pilot instinctively

knew could do tricks—and I put it through all its paces. It wasn't until I came hurtling down through a hole in the overcast in a practice dive at about 450 miles per hour that I realized—at five thousand feet—that I was right in the middle of Liverpool's deadly balloon cables.

I could hear the wings groan in protest as I pulled out of that dive, and if I hadn't been flying a plane with the Airacobra's climbing power I would never have lived to reminisce about it. At over four hundred miles per hour those balloon cables went past me like the teeth of a comb, and I took the only chance open to me: I pushed the throttle wide open and pointed the plane at the sky . . . and she climbed. Every nerve in my body was on edge as I waited for the ripping sound that would mean a cable sawing through a wing, or the terrific rending and crashing that would mean the prop had hit steel. But a breathless minute passed, finally, and my altimeter showed that I was at seven thousand feet—and safe. I leveled off at seventy-five hundred feet and sighed heavily. Even the gray British soup that enveloped me seemed beautiful at that moment, free as it was of balloons and cables.

It had been just shortly after my transfer to Kirkbride that the first Airacobras had arrived in England, and our introduction to them was a dramatic but tragic event. The 'Cobras were terrific-looking planes of radical design, with the motor located behind the pilot and a long, bullet-like snout stretching out in front of the cockpit to the hub of the prop. They were the first planes we had

seen with the new tricycle landing gear. Advance publicity had described them as the hottest fighting plane in Allied production, and their specification sheets gave their sea-level speed as considerably better than any other plane then in service with the R.A.F. Naturally there was considerable competition among the pilots as to who would take the first one off the ground.

I had brought a plane down from Kirkbride to Hawarden Airdrome near Liverpool, and while I was waiting for another delivery chit this first Airacobra to be delivered in England was wheeled out onto the field. We saw it from the pilots' lounge, immediately rushing out to give it the once-over, and the most voluble admirer among us was a Captain Hanley, a Britisher, who had quite a reputation before the war as a sportsman pilot. He was quite a colorful man, at forty-three or four as indifferent to danger and as physically fit and agile as a boy of twenty. Hanley put in a strong bid for the privilege of first flight and he finally got it.

We all gathered on the field to see Captain Hanley take off on his check flight—normally a couple of circles around the field and then down for a report—and I know I wasn't the only one who was alarmed at the way he gunned the 1200-horsepower motor as he shot that Airacobra down the runway. He gave it far more throttle than he needed for his take-off, but he got the ship off the ground all right and was in the middle of a slow climb and wide circle bending around to the left when the ship blew up in mid-air. We had been watching his

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smooth maneuver and were only mildly surprised at the terrific roar of the overrevving motor when it happened.

Looking back on that crash, I think it was the most shocking I have ever seen. When a multi-motored ship limps in on one motor, crashes and perhaps burns, the sight is horrible and lingers with you a long time, but if you have seen it coming in and have appreciated its difficulty you have also partly adjusted yourself to what is liable to happen. Likewise, when you see a plane burst into flame in the air you have some sort of warning; there's disaster there immediately, of course, but it takes a long time for it to become complete and final. There's usually a chance in that case for the pilot to jump. Whether he jumps or not, a burning plane always keeps an even keel for a moment or two after the flames take it over.

In this case there was just one terrific explosion that blew the engine right out of the plane, broke the fuselage and folded the wings, sending the whole mess plummeting to the ground.

A few days after Hanley's crash the second Airacobra to be assembled in England was wheeled onto the field at Kirkbride. Among the pilots on hand at the time I was the only American, and since the plane had to be delivered and no one showed the least enthusiasm for tackling the job, the pool commander, Captain Yardley, figured out an ingenious approach to the problem.

"Nobody *has* to take this plane," he told us. "It's some sort of American contraption that probably wasn't even

tested over there before they sent it across. There are a couple of Americans here, however, and if they think that maybe *they* would like to take a chance . . ."

A moment before I had been willing to let another Britisher have the privilege of flying "Coffin Number Two," but now it was on a different basis. "I'll take it," I said. "If they built it in the States it's good enough for me."

There were a couple of cheers; I remember that. I remember them mostly because they were all tangled up with sighs of relief. I walked out to the plane with a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach and a very serious doubt in my mind that my bravado had been a wise thing.

American planes are different from British types in one major respect. With British planes you find it impossible to explode a motor on take-off by sheer overgunning it—but at that time you could do exactly that with many high-powered American engines. The British have a cut-off system, a boost-control unit, that trims the throttle to what the motor can take and no more, regardless of how much gas the pilot tries to give it. American motors, on the other hand, came only with specific instructions as to how much throttle could be safely used. If those instructions were ignored, or not understood, the same thing was bound to happen to any pilot that happened to Captain Hanley.

I walked around the plane, touching it with cautious fingers, and examining it in every detail, for a good quar-

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ter of an hour. Then I climbed into the cockpit and studied its instruments. I read and reread the instruction sheet a good four or five times—and I memorized the rate of take-off boost (power) to use (which was clearly enough stated), so that I could have thrown the instructions away and not made a mistake along those lines. And finally, after I had started the engine and warmed it to take-off temperature, I signaled Yardley that I was ready to go.

The flight was a breeze. The motor was perfect, although it had so much latent power that I knew with absolute certainty that Captain Hanley had simply exploded his with too much throttle. And it handled with more grace and quicker response to controls than any plane I had ever flown before. It was a honey. When I came down from that ten-minute check flight I stayed on the ground only long enough to get my delivery chit, then I took off again for Lichfield, in central England, where the plane was to be based.

Visibility was fair at Kirkbride, but our reports indicated it was considerably worse in the Lichfield area. By the time I got there it was absolute zero. There was nothing to do but turn back, find the nearest visible field and put down there until the fog lifted.

The ceiling was up to around four hundred feet at Hy Ercall, some forty miles west of Lichfield, so I landed there and spent the night. Next morning I prepared for my take-off, got my weather report from the tower indicating a ceiling of one thousand feet and visibility of

two thousand yards—which was pretty good for England. But for some reason or other, just before I started down the runway, I called a mechanic and had him strap me into the cockpit. I hadn't used shoulder straps twice in all the time I had been in England, but I had a hunch on that trip. Another thing I did, which was lucky as it turned out, was to remove the armored glass plate from the inside of the windshield. Those plates are heavy blocks of glass about two and a half inches thick—excellent protection from head-on machine-gun fire, but no asset to visibility, and I had a vague feeling that I was going to want to see with utmost clarity before I got out of that ship.

I was cruising at eight hundred feet, just under the clouds, and had nothing but plowed fields, a scattering of trees, and the few buildings of a crossroads town below me when the steady roar of the Airacobra's Allison engine suddenly broke into a series of racking coughs and then abruptly cut out. Thinking I might be out of gas, I hastily opened the valves on the auxiliary fuel tanks, but that did no good. At cruising speed I had only about 130 miles per hour to spare before the fast-landing 'Cobra would stall—it was designed to land at 110 miles per hour with the gear up—and speed diminishes quickly at that altitude in a light fighting plane. There was only one thing to do in the few seconds I had to work with: I pushed the stick forward, nosing the plane into a dive to keep it from stalling.

Diving from eight hundred feet doesn't give you much

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time to pick a landing place. Wherever it was, it had to be almost directly below me—and the only smooth spot around which was unimpeded by ditches or trees or plow furrows was a field about fifty yards wide running back from the main street of a crossroads town and fading into a willow grove some two hundred yards back of the two frame buildings it separated. Behind the building on the right a bunch of children were playing, and paralleling the street at the front end of the vacant lot was a multiple row of telephone wires. With the gear up I thought I had a chance of clearing the wires—but I was wrong: the propeller chewed a path right through them. However, this didn't affect the speed of the plane, and I landed with gear up, hard on the 'Cobra's belly, and slid a hundred yards straight down the lawn. The impact of the landing was terrific; it threw me forward and my head smashed against the gun sight, giving me a deep gash on the forehead, but the shoulder straps prevented more serious injury. The straps wouldn't have done any good at all, of course, if the armored glass plate had been in its normal position about twelve inches in front of my face. I would probably have hit that hard enough to break my neck.

I wouldn't have guessed beforehand that I would be so observing of my surroundings while trying to crash-land an Airacobra between two buildings fifty yards apart; but when I loosened the straps and climbed out of the plane I knew with absolute certainty that the building on my left was a pub; that even on my shaking

legs it was within quick walking distance; and that what I needed more than anything else at that moment was a drink. Among the scores of people who swarmed around me and the slightly damaged 'Cobra in the next minute or two was one old fellow with a round red face who wore a short white apron over his big bay window. He was the tavern keeper, and I gave him my undivided attention. .

CHAPTER SIX

Christmas in Wigton

KEITH WILLIAMS and I were sent to Kirkbride at the same time, and during the five months we were there we were billeted in the home of two very lovely old spinster ladies in Wigton, a little bit of a village about three miles from the field.

Mary Little was seventy-two and her sister, Margaret, was sixty-five, and neither one of them was bigger than a minute. They lived on a modest income of some sort, a "pension" they called it, and their little gray stone house, set in the middle of a half acre of lawn and gardens, overlooked the main street of Wigton from the crest of a small hill. Keith Williams might dispute me on the matter of the hill's height, since he had to climb it under extreme difficulties two or three times after we had spent the evening in the Ox Head Tavern in town. So far as I was concerned it was never hard to climb. Mexican

tequila had spoiled my taste for liquor, and even after two or three dogged attempts I still couldn't agree with the British theory that beer should be served *warm*.

The field at Kirkbride was attacked only once while we were based there, but we heard at least a dozen air-raid alarms on the occasions when Jerry took a crack at the industrial district of Carlisle, some twelve miles from the field in the opposite direction from Wigton. There was never any vitally serious damage done at Carlisle—only enough, probably, according to German theory, to weaken the morale of the local citizens. If that was the purpose of the raids they were certainly dismal failures. Even our “girls,” as Keith and I called the Little sisters, used to get fighting mad in spite of their maidenly reserve when they heard about some workman's cottage being wrecked over Carlisle way and his children hurt or killed.

There were a great many new types of aircraft being developed and put into the air at that time, not only by the British and their still “neutral” American friends, but also by the Germans. The result, inevitably, was that a certain amount of dangerous confusion arose. Air Wardens and Home Guards would be advised of the identifying characteristics of the new types as soon as the information was available, but every now and then the information would arrive late or be insufficiently clear, with the unhappy result that an R.A.F. or A.T.A. plane would be fired upon by its own antiaircraft batteries.

CHRISTMAS IN WIGTON

The bombing of the field at Kirkbride was the result of a confusion of this sort—although in this particular case a German pilot emphasized the confusion by a trick of his own.

The field was cleared of planes, fortunately, at the time the German came in, so he succeeded merely in blowing a hole in the runway and destroying an empty hangar. Nonetheless, he could have easily been shot down, for the antiaircraft battery at the end of the field had him in its sights awaiting the signal to fire for fully a minute before he got in too low for their gun to be of any use.

The German was flying a Messerschmidt 110, a new ship at that time, and from a distance it looked almost exactly like the British Hampden. Not having been warned to look out for this new type of German plane, the officer in charge of the antiaircraft gun assumed it was a Hampden and merely went through the usual formality of sighting on it. Then, when the plane got in close, it lowered its landing gear, wiggled its wings a couple of times just as the ferry pilots and R.A.F. boys always did to signal they were going to land.

Jerry got in just close enough to make a bad target for the A.A. gun when suddenly he gave his plane full throttle, retracted his gear, and roared down across the field at about one hundred feet, machine guns and nose cannon blasting. At the center of the field he dropped one bomb, then he cut straight at the hangar and threw two more right through its roof. To put the finishing touch on

his maneuver, he kept his plane just above the treetops, at an impossible level for the embarrassed gunnery officer to get another bead on him until he was well out of range.

Those of us who had been in the pilots' quarters rushed out onto the field in time to see the dust settling around the hangar and to see the Messerschmidt, a mile away by then, spiraling up into the thick overcast a thousand feet above the ground. There wasn't a pursuit or fighter plane on hand, so there was nothing to do but signal other fields in the neighborhood on the chance that one of their boys might intercept him. It was small consolation to us to realize that if we had had a plane on the field ready to go after him, he would undoubtedly have messed it up with the bomb he dropped on the runway.

I was very nearly a victim in a somewhat similar incident when I was ferrying a Hampden bomber from Ayr in northern England to Abbotsinch, a hundred miles or so east-northeast of Ayr along the East Coast. That was on December 3, 1941, during perhaps the worst season of the year for flying in England. The weather was so bad and the overcast so consistently heavy that I think most of us ferry pilots had got out of the habit of watching constantly to right and left and up and down for sight of an enemy plane. Most of the time during those winter months you couldn't see beyond the windows of your cockpit after you were a thousand feet off the ground. The fog was our protection and I, at least on this particular occasion, was counting on it entirely too much.

I was about twenty minutes out of Abbotsinch when

the soup began to thin out a little bit and I took a casual look around to my left and then to my right. Everything was fine on the left, but I was genuinely startled to see a plane that looked just like my own not more than a couple of hundred yards to my right. I grinned and waved a hand in cheery salute. There was ever so slight a hesitation on the part of the other pilot, and I laughed aloud, thinking that he was just as much surprised to see me there as I was to see him.

Ferrying planes through fog day in and day out has a tendency to get rather dull after a while, and it wasn't uncommon when we came across another fellow like that to promote a little horseplay just to pass the time. We were breaking out into fairly clear atmosphere at the moment, so I gunned the engines, pushed the stick, gave a little left rudder and went into a shallow dive. Such a maneuver invited attack, of course, but that was the idea. I was deliberately putting myself into position for him to cover me and mow me down—but he had to move fast. If he didn't, I would have the advantage of speed in climbing out of my dive and maneuvering for top position on him.

I was just leveling out when I heard the crack of bullets and felt a jarring succession of holes ripped into the tip of my right wing. I couldn't believe it at first; I looked all around me for another plane; but I knew instinctively, even though I hated to admit it, that I had invited attack from a new type German medium bomber. Later I learned its name: the Messerschmidt 110.

WE FLEW WITHOUT GUNS

The good visibility that I had been so happy about a moment before was now a desperately serious hazard. The German had at least four machine guns and a cannon; I could assume that because that was what the Hampden carried. The difference was, the German's guns were loaded—and mine were not.

The Hampden is a good plane, and it has a lot of climbing power. But so had that Messerschmidt. I tried to outclimb it but couldn't, and being out in front, every move I made either to the side or upwards gave him a better target. There was no room for doubt on that score when I saw how the German stayed well behind me, just waiting for me to go left or right or up, when he could promptly nail me.

I was at about seven hundred feet and he was right on my tail. It was a serious question whether I had room enough between me and the ground to try another dive; on the other hand it was a far more serious question whether I would live another two minutes if I didn't. So I dived.

Probably the dive in itself surprised the German, since it was executed at so dangerous an altitude; and as I leveled out at about one hundred feet I cut the throttle and let down my landing flaps. From a speed of 240 miles per hour I pulled the Hampden down to around a hundred, and the German, even though he dived just a split second after I did, overshot me badly.

He hadn't lost speed, of course; in fact, his dive had increased his speed; so before he could get back in a posi-

tion above me to attack again I was able to get to about four hundred feet and give a second's thought to my next move. By then, because of his higher speed, he had gained some seven or eight hundred feet, and I felt like a clay pigeon sitting there waiting for his slugs.

When a person feels a blow coming at the top of his head I suppose he instinctively ducks—tries to lower his head so the blow won't land so hard. That was the way I reacted to that Messerschmidt coming in on me from above; I ducked. I pushed the nose of my plane straight down—and again I took no bad blows, just a few holes along the rear fuselage and the tail surfaces. Then again I was way down close to the ground and completely at the German's mercy.

A few miles to the west of Abbotsinch there was a secret R.A.F. base, and the only thing I could think of as I started hedgehopping on a beeline toward that base was the possibility of attracting the attention of a couple of R.A.F. fighters. I swung the controls to the left and then to the right; and every time Jerry seemed set to give me a burst from his guns I would drop the landing flaps, cut the throttle and let him tear past me. By sticking close to the ground like that, only varying my speed but never trying for more altitude, I could at least keep him from getting under me; and small as that satisfaction was, it was still something.

Through his rather poor marksmanship and my own willingness to risk a stall and a nose dive rather than a burst from his guns, I managed to lead him directly over

the R.A.F. base—and I don't believe it was more than a matter of seconds before a pair of Spitfires were in the air chasing that German out over the Channel.

I don't know whether they got him or not. I kept right on toward Abbotsinch after they took him off my tail, delivered my plane, and took a chit on another one for farther south, Colerne, near Bristol. But I certainly hope they got him because he was my idea of a first-class heel. He knew after his first couple of shots at me that I was flying for the Air Transport Auxiliary. And he knew that we flew without guns. . . .

One of the pleasantest memories I have of England in general and the Little sisters in particular concerns the Christmas dinner that they prepared for Keith Williams and me that December of 1941. I don't know what Christmas had been for them in the years prior to the war, but that Christmas I think must stand out in their memories as well as my own as something extra special.

Keith and I had grown to feel like members of the family. We were both Americans, he probably twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, short, stockily built, an Indiana boy who retained that rural look. I was a lad who had been raised in Brooklyn and scarcely knew there was such a thing as a world beyond the tall buildings and noisy streets and dirty alleys of New York until I learned to fly. And there we were, those two little old ladies whom we called "the girls," and Keith and myself, living in Eng-

land in vine-covered "Brasfort House" on a hill overlooking the little hamlet of Wigton.

There was always uncertainty as to the time of our return when either Keith or I took off to deliver a plane. We might get orders to take a Spitfire to Bristol, deep in southern England, and when we did we never knew but that we would be away anywhere from two to five days. At Bristol we might be given a ship to deliver to Norwich, and from there we might be sent to Prestwick—and so on. But on Christmas Eve both Keith and I asked for assignments that would keep us near home because we knew that Mary and Margaret had made very elaborate plans for our Christmas dinner.

Everything worked out perfectly so far as our assignments were concerned. Most of the English pilots wanted to get back home for the holiday—in most cases that meant a point far distant from Kirkbride—and among the Americans there were few who didn't want to get to London for the day. That left only one or two besides Keith and myself who were content to linger in the north reaches of the islands over the holidays.

When we got to the field on the morning of the twenty-fourth there was a Spitfire waiting for me and the destination was Lichfield. That was perfect. An hour and a half down; a wait of an hour or two for another ship, probably to be brought back to Kirkbride or some R.A.F. base nearby—and then home.

Keith got just as nice a break. He had a Hampden bomber, also bound for Lichfield. As we taxied out onto

the runway Keith waved and then gripped his hands over his head. We were both thinking of the tree that our "girls" had tried to hide out in the backyard, and how it would look decorated with candles and tinsel when we got back that evening. We were also thinking of the turkey that we had seen on the back porch, and how it would look tomorrow when we came downstairs after a long Christmas sleep and sat down for our dinner. Then Keith gave his Hampden the throttle, raced down the field and slid into the air. I took off after him in the Spitfire, slow-rolled around his heavy bomber a couple of times, and then lit out for Lichfield.

I didn't see Kirkbride again for three days. From Lichfield I took a plane to Croydon, just outside London. From there I got one bound for Bristol; then another for Lowenstoft on the channel. From there to Abbotsinch, and from there to Ayr. Not until December 27 did I get a plane for Kirkbride. When I circled over the cottage and gunned the motor twice to signal my return I felt like the worst kind of a dog. I didn't mind that I had had only cold roast beef and cauliflower for Christmas dinner at the Rock Hotel in Bristol between hops; it was thinking of the "girls" and the swell dinner they had prepared for us that was really bitter. My only consolation was that there had at least been three of them, Keith and our two hostesses.

But when I got back to the cottage Margaret told me that Keith hadn't been home for Christmas either. She was the most crestfallen little person I've ever seen.

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I was trying to say something that would make her feel a little better when there was the roar of a plane overhead and a single gunning of the motor. Keith was back. All three of us, Mary and Margaret and I, ran out into the yard and waved. Keith replied with a screaming power dive; then he streaked for the airport. In less than twenty minutes he was home.

I had been washing up meanwhile, and when Keith arrived I suggested that we take Mary and Margaret down into the village for supper. After all, they had had their Christmas dinner alone and the least we could do was to put on a little show for them as an indication of our own disappointment at not being there.

Keith was all for the idea, and the moment we were dressed we dashed downstairs to spring our surprise—and we were surprised instead. There on the table was the turkey. Mary and Margaret stood beaming at either end of the table, watching us as our eyes swept over the mashed potatoes and string beans and gravy and cranberry sauce and wild-rice dressing and steaming pudding.

“I didn’t know how we could keep the turkey from getting dry,” Mary said finally—since neither Keith nor I could find words, “but Margaret wrapped it in a wet towel and kept it warm for three days. We—we hope it will taste all right . . .”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Death Breaks a Holiday

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FORTY-TWO was going to be given a really rousing welcome by the A.T.A. pilots based at Kirkbride; our plans were made a good month in advance. There was so much talk about all the hell we were going to raise, in fact, that four or five of the pilots from other pools were hoping to get a ship to ferry up our way in time for the festivities. We were going across to Dublin on December 31 to help the wild Irish knock down and drag in the new year.

Lee Garlow suggested the plan one day toward the end of November when I met him down at White Waltham. He was still based there, having stayed on after Keith Williams and I went to Kirkbride. But he had applied for a transfer and expected it to come through in another day or so. Actually, it never did come through—at least not in time for Lee to know anything about it.

"What do you boys do up there—for a good time, I mean?" Lee had asked as we sat in the pilots' lounge at White Waltham that day waiting for flying orders. "There's not much doing in Carlisle, is there?"

"I've been over there a few times," I replied, "but it isn't much. 'Junior' Fulton and 'Country Boy' Cooper are the only ones really nuts about the place. They found themselves a couple of babes on the first visit and every time they go back they find a few more. Junior says he thinks he'll settle down there after the war."

Lee laughed, thinking of round-faced little Fulton, who earned the name "Junior" through being the youngest Yankee in the A.T.A. I don't think he was more than twenty, although he claimed to be twenty-two. "If she quits, I'll bail!" Lee quoted, mimicking Junior's high treble. "If he's said that once he's said it a hundred times—and I'll bet if a motor ever conks on him, he'll try everything he knows before thinking about his chute."

Lee Garlow had been a lot like Fulton when I first knew him; completely carefree, liking the danger of his job, and in every minute of his spare time looking for a gang to drink with or a girl to kiss. He had brought the playboy spirit with him from the States, where he had been a rich man's son, a sportsman flier, and even at one time a Hollywood actor. He was a handsome boy, six feet tall, broad-shouldered and straight, with curly black hair, a trim mustache and the manner of Ronald Colman at his best.

But Lee had changed after flying with the A.T.A. for a

few months. He was more serious and he seemed to take a sincere pride in the work he was doing. He told me once that flying for England was the first real job he had ever had and the first honest responsibility he had ever felt. During his few months over there he became one of the best ferry pilots we had.

"For almost two months I've been living like a Boy Scout, Gen," Lee said that day at White Waltham, "and I'm planning to keep it up. But I'm going to cut loose once—just once—and that'll be New Year's Eve. Nineteen hundred and forty-two is going to mean a lot to me. It will be my first year as—well, as a man. Up till a couple of months ago I was never anything but a kid. Pockets lined with easy dough, a belly full of booze half the time—and I thought I was living—high, wide and handsome. Hell! I didn't know what it was all about."

I didn't feel philosophical, and I laughed. "Well," I said, "it's nice to know you've found the answer. But getting back to New Year's Eve—if you're figuring on celebrating in Carlisle I think you'll be disappointed. Why don't you try to get to London? You know all the spots there—"

"I know them all and I'm sick of them," Lee said. "What I had in mind was that I'll be stationed at Kirkbride through the holidays and it would be easy to get to Dublin from there. I'd like to see Dublin and the way the turkeys hail the New Year . . ."

That was how it started—with Lee Garlow wanting to put a highlight on the new life he was living, wanting to

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put on a show for 1942, the year that was going to be a really big and meaningful one for him.

And this is how it ended:

Lee's transfer didn't come through, and he was still at White Waltham when the holidays rolled around, but the crowd planning on seeing Dublin New Year's Eve had swelled to truly great proportions. "Country Boy" Cooper was going to forsake Carlisle and his bevy of beautiful babies and join us; so was Junior Fulton—a little reluctantly, but ever eager to explore other and possibly greener pastures; and there was Al Gingiss, "Robby" Robertson, Fritz Daniels, Skippy Lane, and Keith Williams and myself, based at Kirkbride. Larry King and "Pappy" Mills and Julius Petach also planned to go, although they too were based, with Lee Garlow, at White Waltham. Gilson Jacobson hadn't planned to join us but finally did, having been given a plane to take to Prestwick on December 30.

When I got back to Kirkbride on December 27—just in time for that much-delayed Christmas dinner with Mary and Margaret Little—"Country Boy" Cooper came out to meet me on the field. I should have known from his manner that he had something important to tell me, but I didn't think about it at the time. I was feeling good and I was anxious to get "home"; the plane I'd brought up was a Spitfire, full of the kind of dynamite that gets into a pilot's veins; and I'd had a narrow squeeze with a Jerry in a Messerschmidt fighter twenty minutes before—all in

all, I wasn't in the mood for hangar talk, and I wanted nothing but to check the plane in and beat it.

"Have you got a minute, Gen?" Cooper asked me, and I said, "Not now, pal, I got a date with a hot bath and a couple of gals."

I mentioned the "gals" as an afterthought, just to kid Cooper, the Carlisle Beau Brummell, and the remark brought a curious glow into his eyes. While he was staring at me I raced over to the field office and turned in my chit. Then I went home.

Not until after dinner (that colossal dinner that the Little sisters had kept in perfect condition for two days) did Keith have a chance to tell me the news. He had heard it from Skippy Lane that morning at Prestwick.

Lee Garlow had landed at Kirkbride the day before. He was delivering his plane to a field far north in Scotland, but had stopped off on the chance that he would find me and work out the final details of the Dublin trip. I wasn't there and neither was Keith, but Cooper had been on hand, and Lee had told him that everything was set; he would be kept up north through the thirtieth, then he would be given a plane to bring to Kirkbride on the thirty-first. He would come down in the morning and we would leave for Dublin in the afternoon.

Lee took off from Kirkbride after his brief conversation with Cooper. He climbed into his plane, a Lockheed Hudson, and in the cockpit he turned and waved. Then he roared down the runway, took off and circled the field, disappearing into the overcast to the north.

That was the last time Lee was seen alive. The burned wreckage of his plane was spotted from the air that next day on a hillside about a hundred miles from the base, and a land party later brought out the body. There never was a complete explanation of what had happened, but the best guess was that Lee's engine had cut out without warning, that he had come out of the overcast to look for a place to land, and had struck the hillside at almost full flying speed.

Most of the boys who had planned to spend New Year's Eve with Lee in Dublin were at Prestwick for his funeral on December 29. The ceremony was similar to that accorded other A.T.A. pilots who were killed in the line of duty: a small column of Home Guards paraded before the casket as it was carried to the grave by six A.T.A. men in uniform, and martial music was provided by half a dozen Scots blaring on their bagpipes. Lee's casket was draped with an American flag, and American Army taps was sounded by the trumpeter. Then the Home Guards fired a rifle salute and the casket was lowered into the ground.

It was especially fitting that the cemetery at Prestwick should accommodate the bodies of American boys lost in the A.T.A. It was the one cemetery that all of us saw most often, since it was located on a hillside less than a mile from the Prestwick Airdrome and could easily be seen as we took off or landed there. It is bad enough to be buried thousands of miles from home, but it would seem even worse to be buried in a place not easily accessible

to your friends—whose intention would be to remember, but whose tendency would be to forget.

We had a party New Year's Eve, but none of us wanted to go to Dublin. We went to Carlisle instead. I didn't think it was going to be much fun, but it was. We lined up at the bar in the hotel and Country Boy offered a toast to Lee, the gist of it being that we would make 1942 a good year for the Air Transport Auxiliary even though Lee wasn't going to be with us. A little on the gloomy side for New Year's Eve, but nobody complained, because the whole idea of the get-together had centered around Lee, the reformed playboy.

There were six R.A.F. pilots standing near us at the bar. They heard the toast and, of course, liked it—and promptly became part of our party. One of them knew the headwaiter and managed to get a couple of tables pushed together in the crowded ballroom, and we swarmed in there. By then most of the lads had had several drinks and what had started out to be a rather solemn occasion began to brighten into a gay one.

There was only one trouble: there were no girls in our group. That was why Keith Williams and I were rubber-necking around at the other tables. Suddenly, with quick intakes of breath, we saw the vision seated at a small table across the room. The vision's companion was a girl, too, and that would have been perfect except that when the vision caught our wide-eyed stares she turned on more ice than I was to see in all Tibet later.

"I'll bet you ten pounds she won't touch you with a

ten-foot pole," Keith said as we turned back to the table still shivering.

"I'm afraid you're right," I said, but after a moment's consideration I changed my mind. After all, ten pounds is forty dollars. "Tell you what I'll do, Keith: I'll bet you ten pounds I'll be sitting at her table within twenty minutes."

"It's a bet," Keith said.

I took a personal card from my billfold and wrote across its back: "That was the best performance I have ever seen. May I sit at your table a moment just for a close-up of those amazing eyes of yours?"

Two shillings persuaded the waiter to put the card on a silver platter and carry it over to the vision, and a few minutes later he returned. My card was still on the tray. With a feeling of defeat I picked it up, starting to put it in my pocket. The waiter leaned close and said, "Turn it over, sir." I did. Inscribed across the back in a smooth feminine hand were the words: "You are very flattering, Captain. Miss Elsie Pomoroy and I should be happy to meet you." The signature was "Ruthine Tainsh."

I handed the card to Keith and said, "You can pay me now, if you like."

Keith was speechless as he read the note. He started to reach for his wallet, still shaking his head, and then abruptly changed his mind. "The bet was that you'd be sitting at her table in twenty minutes. I'll pay off when you've done that."

I sneered as I got up, thinking him a very stuffy quib-

bler, but a few minutes later I realized that he was simply using his head. By waiting until I had joined the gorgeous Ruthine and Miss Pomoroy, Keith had a natural entree for making it a foursome. He waited until the two girls and I were comfortably settled around the table, before he walked over, slapped me on the back and dropped a ten-pound note in front of me. The girls were naturally curious, and by the time the bet had been explained Keith had pulled up a chair for himself and the party was well on its way.

Ruthine Tainsh was just as nice as she was beautiful, and that is saying a lot. It turned out that she was a show-girl with the ENSA, the British equivalent of our USO entertainment program, and was currently appearing in "Jack and the Beanstalk," a popular comedy playing at one of the theaters in Carlisle. It was not until she had told me that, that I realized why my note had been so effective. My statement, "That was the best performance I have ever seen," she interpreted as a compliment to her acting ability, when I had been referring to her icy glare. I didn't confess then, nor until a long time later, after we had got to know each other quite well, that I hadn't seen "Jack and the Beanstalk." When she stopped laughing she made a confession of her own; she was rather near-sighted, so the icy glare hadn't been intentional at all but merely a matter of not being able to see across the smoke-filled ballroom of the Carlisle Hotel.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Relief—with Royal Ducks

THERE WERE A NUMBER of women in the A.T.A., probably the most famous of them being Amy Mollison, former round-the-world flyer, who was killed in the spring of 1941 when the plane she was ferrying crashed into the Thames Estuary. Her husband, Jimmy Mollison, equally famous in his own right as a racing-plane pilot before the war, was in the Ferry Command at that time and, so far as I know, still is. Others among the women pilots were Jacqueline Cochran, American trans-Atlantic flyer and wife of the New York financier, Floyd Odium; Ruth Lambton, better known to her admirers in England as "Buzz"; and Mrs. Faith Bennett, wife of Charles Bennett, the well-known Hollywood director. They were a competent group of flyers, those women, and for the

most part extremely conscientious. None of them, so far as I ever heard, was subject to the same tendency toward horseplay that most of the male contingent displayed, and for that reason they were more of a joy to the Air Ministry and to the individual field officers than many of the men.

Horseplay may seem to have no place in the serious business of war, but I think it has—to some extent at least. Al Gingiss, the Chicago boy who flew with me in China after we finished our contracts in England, who was always addicted to horseplay, puts the case pretty clearly in these words: "You can't fly constantly under the most difficult conditions without having some kind of relief. If you can get your relief on the ground, okay; but getting the ferrying job done in England was more important than pampering the pilots, and we had little time on the ground. So a lot of us took the only alternative and took our relief in the air—in horseplay."

Al and I were flying a pair of Beaufighters up to a field near Aberdeen on the northeast coast of Scotland one day in January, 1942, and Al made the happy discovery that his machine guns were loaded. That was rare, and the horseplay addicts never found anything that made them gayer. He fired a couple of bursts under my tail by way of telling me what he had found. I promptly investigated and found mine in the same condition.

We were following the coast line at the time and, searching the ground for a likely target, we were disappointed to find nothing better than rocks and marsh to

shoot at. The best kind of "victim" would be a rotted old pier or a log jutting out into the water. But there was nothing. The coast was barren. And then, with a rocking motion of his wings, Al drew my attention to a row of big round objects floating in a long row some hundred yards or so out in the sea. He promptly dove, all guns blazing, and knocked off two of the mines on the first try. I dove and picked off two more. Then we tried a formation attack and exploded five mines between us. For twenty minutes we "sought relief," as Gingiss put it, and as a matter of fact we found it. It was a thrill to feel the offensive power of the planes, to feel those guns blasting under our fingers, to escape for a few brief moments into an imaginary world of combat and action. It was easy to imagine that the mines were enemy tanks churning down a dusty road on the way to the front, that they were German transports and landing craft bearing down on the English coast—and we were the knights in shining armor who destroyed them as they came.

The Air Ministry raised particular hell about that little incident—in a dignified way, of course. A bulletin was issued a week later and posted in all the A.T.A. offices and pilots' lounges, relating that certain coastal mines off northeastern Scotland had been fired upon by planes believed to have been in transit from one air base to another, and that all A.T.A. pilots were hereby warned and advised against such conduct on pain of permanent suspension from the service. "American pilots will pay particular attention to this order," the bulletin concluded.

"I have a sneaking suspicion they're talking about us," Gingiss remarked. I was forced to agree with him.

I never fired on any mines after that, although I did feel a bit of envy at times when I heard about mines along other parts of the coast being mysteriously exploded by "unidentified" planes. And the smug expression on Gingiss and certain others of the boys on occasion—usually about the time such reports were being circulated—was hard to take.

Gingiss and I used to see quite a bit of a chap named Steve Bevell, more or less of an old hand with the A.T.A., and Gingiss was especially delighted at the many ways Steve could figure out for "seeking relief" from the boredom of flying. It was the last week of Steve's contract, just before he was to return to the States, that he let Gingiss and myself in on a very special prize in the way of horseplay—duck-hunting in King George VI's private preserves.

It isn't everybody who has bagged a royal duck, and it certainly isn't everybody who has bagged them the way Steve Bevell and Gingiss and I did that historic January afternoon in 1942. We were flying Hurricane fighters, delivering them to a base on the East Coast. Just before we took off Steve had discovered that the guns were loaded.

When three Hurricanes flying in fighting formation put the heat on a flock of ducks, particularly royal ducks home-based on the grounds of Windsor Castle, you have something unique in the way of sport. Actually you don't

hit very many ducks—in fact, if you hit one in a dozen tries you are doing all right. But the accuracy required even to draw a bead on a slow-moving mallard through the gun sights on a Hurricane doing 250 miles an hour is enough to make it a truly competitive proposition. For ten or fifteen minutes we attacked the birds; during that time I bagged one and Bevell claimed to have got two. I don't know how many Gingiss shot, but one was found in the wing of his plane a few days later when a salvage crew picked its pieces out of a pasture a few miles from the scene of the engagement.

Steve had been the master of the hunt that day, and when he figured we had had enough of it for the nonce he dipped his wings in a signal to be on our business, then swung off toward the east. I caught the signal just as I was about to lunge at another bird, but checked the dive and headed out after him. Gingiss waved at me from some distance away, indicating that he would be along in a minute; he hadn't got a bird up till then, and I could appreciate his reluctance to leave. We left him to his sport and went on to deliver our planes.

The story Gingiss told later before the Accident Committee was an amazing one, but I am afraid it had little actual relation to the facts. He was always reticent about the details, but piecing odd remarks together, I am inclined to believe that he was in the process of slaughtering one particular duck when suddenly a whole batch of the birds flew in front of him. At 250 miles per hour the impact was terrific. His windshield was badly cracked

and smeared with blood, his prop was broken; and in jettisoning his cockpit hood to stick his head out and see where he was going, the hood crashed into the vertical tail fin, making it useless for controlling the plane. Spotting a pasture directly below him, he made the mistake of judging it hard ground, and let his wheels down for the landing. When they touched they sank deep in the marshy topsoil, the plane swung around, the engine was ripped out, and the wings smashed. Gingiss himself was thrown clear and suffered only a gash on the head.

The story he told the Accident Committee was far more interesting. It was bad weather for flying, he explained, the fog being thick as oatmeal. His only recourse, unless he wanted to break A.T.A. regulations and fly by instruments, was to fly extremely low, following the railroad tracks. (Fortunately there were some railroad tracks in the neighborhood.) In accordance with international law he flew on the right side of the tracks, despite the fact that he might have had better visibility on the left side, and because he couldn't see very clearly he ran smack into this flock of ducks.

"The fault was entirely on the part of the ducks," Gingiss concluded in relating his story to Accident Committee. "They were flying on the wrong side of the tracks."

Al was exonerated of all blame and, because of the difficult landing he had made, he was commended for coming through safely.

Steve Bevell was flying a Hurricane from Scotland to

Hawarden two days after the duck episode—only three days before he was to return to the States—when for some reason he had to abandon his plane. The wreckage of the plane was found, and so was Steve's parachute. But Steve was never seen or heard from again.

There had been quite a number of fatal crashes among the A.T.A. pilots during the late fall of 1941, and some of the boys, including myself, had acquired a subconscious morbid feeling about the whole thing. During December five boys whom I knew quite well were killed: Bill McFarland, Kenneth Seeds, Sid Pirades, Elmer Ulich, and of course my special friend Lee Garlow, who was killed the day after Christmas. Of all those deaths, however, the one that had the profoundest effect on me was Elmer Ulich's. That was because it should never have happened; it was the result of incompetence and stupidity on the part of our own people, the ground forces, who had our lives in their hands at all times.

Ulich was delivering a Liberator bomber, a new ship at that time, and while he was crossing the Irish Sea he passed low over an antiaircraft battery along the coast. The ship was one of the first Liberators in England, that must be granted, but through some grim blunder on someone's part the antiaircraft crew had not been advised of its being a new addition to the British Air Force. Elmer Ulich was shot down and killed by British antiaircraft fire.

I was in London early in January on a few days' leave and I was obsessed with the screwy idea that I ought to

get a good-luck charm; there had been too many accidents lately and I was beginning to think too much about death. I looked through the stock of several shops for a suitable ring or pin, but nothing seemed to hold much promise. One night at the hotel Skippy Lane, Julius Petach, Gingiss and I started being as deliberately gruesome as we could be. It wasn't funny, but it seemed so to us at the time—at least we laughed a lot during the conversation. We talked about how it would be best to die: in a burning plane, or from crash-impact; from a German's machine-gun fire, or from a faulty parachute jump. We covered all the possibilities of sudden and violent death, and when the meeting was over I had a grotesque but persistent impression in my mind. I saw a death's-head ring of dull gray silver, with hollow eyes and bony cheeks and gaping jaw; and in the hollows of the eyes I felt that one day, if I lived through it all, I would put two beautiful sparkling diamonds.

I went to a jeweler in Piccadilly Circus next day and had him make such a ring for me. The night it was finished Skippy, Al, Petach and I drank champagne and christened the grim image "Abou." We rubbed his horrible face for luck, and even as my fingers were performing that farcical rite the air-raid sirens began to scream and for most of the night hours London was under violent bombing attack. . . .

I still wear "Abou," and I still look forward to the day when, with my aged feet encased in carpet slippers and my palsied hands never more to touch a plane's controls,

I shall call a jeweler and order those two sparkling diamonds for "Abou's" eyes.

Just before my stay in London was over and I was due to return to Kirkbride, Petach, who was still stationed at White Waltham, told me a strange thing.

There was a Scotchman stationed at the base in Dumfries, Scotland, whose name was Wells, known to most of the A.T.A. pilots for his salty humor and his undying devotion to his native Scotland. But more than that, according to Petach, he was noted for his autograph book and the legend that had grown up around it. Petach asked me if I had put my name in Wells' book, and he was very much concerned when I told him that the legend was a lot of poppycock, and that I had never intended to "sign in."

I recalled the last time I had seen Wells, some three weeks previous to that last night of my leave in London. "Ye're a reet guid bairn," Wells had said, clutching my arm with his bony, sandy-haired hand, "but ye're ken o' me book is no guid. 'Tis a giver o' life, me book. A giver o' life an' protector o' limb."

"Sandy, you're getting pottier every day," I had told him, laughing. "What the devil could an old Irishman like you know about giving life and protecting limbs?"

"Irishman?" the old man had cried, eyes blazing. "Why, ye bluddy Yankee fool—" and he carried on at a terrific rate until I was long out of earshot. It was an un-failing means of getting a rise out of old Wells. All of us took brutal advantage of the fact.

On January 19, shortly after I had returned to the pool at Kirkbride, a priority A-1 call came in for delivery of a Wellington bomber to Dumfries. The weather was bad; the temperature was well below freezing, and there were occasional snow flurries; the ceiling was about one thousand feet, and the sky had a blue-gray cast to it that promised almost any kind of storm or fast-changing weather conditions. No one had been flying at Kirkbride that day. Actually all pilots in A.T.A. were grounded, I learned later; that is, except me.

The policy in the A.T.A. was to leave the choice of flying in bad weather entirely to the pilots. When a call for a plane came in, the pool commander would post the request, or simply call the pilots' lounge and ask for volunteers. If conditions were obviously unsuitable for flying, the request would be simply formality, but nonetheless it was always done.

The phone rang in the lounge and I picked it up. The caller was Captain Yardley, our pool commander. "There's a call for a Wellington, delivery at Dumfries, Priority A-1. The soup's getting thicker all the time. Looks as though they'll have to do some waiting." He started to hang up, having gone through the formality of contacting the pilots.

"Wait a minute, Captain," I said—and I still don't know why I said it. "A Wellington? I think I'll take it."

"Is this Genovese?"

"Right, sir."

"You're crazy."

"Right again—but I think I'll take it."

"The weather station says it's worse at Dumfries than it is here. You won't be able to land."

"If the runway's still in the same place I'll find it," I said, and hung up.

The runway at Dumfries was in its usual place, all right, but I was beginning to doubt it seriously along about my sixth instrument approach. The snow was blowing so hard I couldn't see two hundred yards ahead of me, and the Dumfries field is located in a small valley surrounded by steep hills. The approach had to be perfect, or it was almost bound to be disastrous, so I just kept on trying—taking what bearings I could, cutting back to the lowland southeast along the Firth of Forth after each attempt, dropping down to where I could get a glimpse of the ground, skimming along until I identified some familiar landmark, and then making quick calculations and pulling back up again to take another pass. On the eighth attempt I managed to spot five landmarks in a four-mile stretch and as I passed over each one I was directly on course. They marked a straight line to the runway, so when my calculations showed that the field was directly ahead I let the big Wellington down. She touched her wheels right on the spot, and we pulled up like a taxicab in front of Sandy Wells' watch office.

At the sight of me coming in like that out of a full-blown blizzard, Sandy's wrinkled old face took on a

scowl that was something to see. "Ye airn't in ye're reet mind, fleein' sich a dee as this," he cried. "An' ye a laddie wi'out the sinse t' put ye're name in me guid book!"

"Don't start that again, Sandy," I said. "Just get me another plane so I can get out of this God-forsaken hole."

"Not on me life will ye be fleein' inn'y morrr this dee," Wells replied flatly.

I took some money out of my pocket and tossed it on his desk. "Bet you ten shillings you can't get me a plane," I said.

Sandy Wells looked at the money and the battle within his old Scottish heart was short and decisive. "Ye'll lose ye're bet," he said, pursing his lips. "But first ye'll put ye're name in the guid book."

So I signed the book at last, and Sandy got me a Hurricane to fly back to Kirkbride. The weather there by then was as bad as at Dumfries, but my first instrument approach brought me safely down on the runway. I wondered about that for some time and kept tying it in, unreasonably of course, with my having signed Sandy's "guid book." But then something he had told me as I signed my name—and demonstrated by going back over the other names of A.T.A. pilots listed there—kept running through my mind.

Every boy I knew whose name was in Sandy's book was alive. Julius Petach had had a terrible crash at White Waltham back in November, and for several days in the hospital he hadn't been given a chance to live, but he was flying again within a month. The date of his signa-

ture was three days before his crash. And there was a striking absence of five names in Sandy's ledger: Bill McFarland, Kenneth Seeds, Sid Pirades, Elmer Ulich, and Lee Garlow. They hadn't signed Sandy's book—and all of them were dead.

CHAPTER NINE

Ratcliffe Hall in Leicestershire

BY THE TIME April rolled around in 1942 British war policy was well onto the offensive, and many of the A.T.A. bases that had been important during the Battle of Britain were fading in significance with the new need for assertive air war against Europe. Consequently, the A.T.A. began to concentrate more and more of its personnel in the central and southern sections of England.

I was transferred from Kirkbride, on England's northern border, to Ratcliffe Airdrome in Leicestershire, south-central England. The billet there was a rare privilege and a striking contrast to what I had known in Wigton—although I can't say that it surpassed Brasfort House in the way of comfortable and congenial living. It was wealth and luxury, contrasted with wholesome simplicity. It's nice to have a taste of both, but the latter wears better.

RATCLIFFE HALL

My hosts—or rather I should say, our hosts, because there were usually five or six of us A.T.A. pilots billeted at Ratcliffe Hall at the same time—were Sir Lindsay and Lady Everard. Sir Lindsay was a rather elderly gentleman, gray-haired and the very soul of English hospitality and dignity. A member of Parliament and a welcome frequenter of most of London's better clubs, he took it upon himself to show us a side of London that otherwise we might never have seen—dining in the finest restaurants, visiting his clubs, sitting in the gallery during Parliamentary sessions, and meeting and talking with his colleagues. One day we went up to London, and he had me elected an honorary member of the British Aero Club—a distinction that swelled my head for days. Sir Lindsay's own entree to the Club was on the basis of his being a Vice Air Marshal in the R.A.F., although not a pilot himself.

The Everard family fortune was founded upon Everard Beer—quite well-known in England—and, quite appropriately, Ratcliffe Hall was a marvelous billet for the drinking members of the A.T.A.—which included practically all of the pilots.

Skippy Lane's favorite pre-dinner remark after we had been at Ratcliffe a couple of months, and which he delivered with an accomplished feminine shudder, was: "If they serve that 1916 vintage champagne again, I'll scream!" Skippy wouldn't have screamed, not by a long shot—unless it was for more of the stuff—but the crack wasn't too much of an exaggeration. Sir Lindsay had the

finest wine cellar I have ever seen, and there wasn't a drink that anyone could ask for that the butler and his staff of aides and maids could not produce.

Even the matter of our payment for board and room was accomplished with great dignity and grace at Ratcliffe. Where at Mary and Margaret Little's in Wigton we had handed our hostesses two pounds each week, in person and with simple frankness, at Ratcliffe Hall we had no financial dealings with Sir Lindsay and Lady Everard at all. Instead, we placed the notes in an envelope addressed to the butler and handed it to a maid for delivery.

In those days Ratcliffe Airdrome was swarming with the finest array of airplanes any pilot ever saw. There were Douglasses and Wellingtons and Beaufighters and Hurricanes and P-40's and Spitfires and Airacobras and Mitchel Bombers and Miles Masters and Hampdens—every type of plane being turned out by the expanding war machine of Great Britain and the United States. It was a pilots' heaven, and even though the work was a strain at times because there was so much of it to do, there wasn't a man among us as far as I know who wasn't having the time of his life.

With all the deliveries we were making, it got so that we could predict with almost 100 percent accuracy just when and where the next big raid over Europe would take place. We would get orders in the morning to deliver twenty Wellington bombers to a particular base near the channel. Four or five of us would be assigned to the job,

and with each flight a taxi plane would go along. We would deliver the first part of the shipment, hop into the waiting taxi plane and beat it back to Ratcliffe for our next ships. There would be four or five flights the same day, and by five or six o'clock in the evening all the ships would have been delivered. That night we would sit around the radio at Ratcliffe Hall waiting for news reports. "It ought to be a good night for bombing," one of us would say. "It got dark pretty early. They ought to be over their objectives by now . . ." And we would wait up until 12:00 P.M. or 1:00 A.M. hoping for a report. Once in a while we would get one, too, although usually we had to read all about it in the next morning's newspaper. "A fleet of twenty Wellington bombers with fighter escort raided German coast defenses near Dieppe last night. Great damage was done and only two of our planes failed to return . . ."

Only two planes failed to return. . . . Sometimes I wonder if the people who write words like that know what they're writing. *Only* two planes—*only* two crews—*only* six, eight, ten, or maybe twenty boys, failed to return. I wonder if they have to use that word *only*. It's only two planes, all right, but it's hard to think of *only* twenty men, captured or dying or dead behind the German lines.

Listening to the radio evenings was a major part of our relaxation at Ratcliffe Hall, largely because being far out from the city there wasn't much else to do, and also because the guests of Sir Lindsay and Lady Everard

—and they were legion—were interesting to meet. The huge lounges and parlors and living-rooms in their mammoth house could accommodate scores of people without seeming crowded, and you never knew, when you wandered into one of those big and luxuriously furnished rooms, what celebrated figure in British, American or international circles you might meet. Naturally a common ground for conversation with such people was often lacking for many of us, but our A.T.A. insignia cleared away most of the barriers.

I recall one evening in particular when we were sitting around the huge fireplace in the main living-room—the largest fireplace in all of England, incidentally—and the radio brought us that German anomaly, quite famous early in the war, Lord Haw-Haw. A British bombing mission of a few days before had been reported through German sources as having destroyed a lot of civilian dwellings and killed a large number of people in the Lubeck area. Lord Haw-Haw referred to the incident in his broadcast that night and, following a bitter denunciation of the affair, said that a retaliatory raid would be made on Bath at nine o'clock that night. His broadcast was from 6:00 to 6:30 and it seemed rather stupid to be announcing such a thing so far in advance. Furthermore, while the British raid on Lubeck may well have damaged civilian property, it was quite evident that it had been directed at the industrial plants in the same area. But there was nothing industrial about Bath; it's an age-old resort town, for years a popular retiring place for pen-

sioned Army and Navy men and their families. We laughed at the very idea of bombing the place and gave it no further thought.

Next morning my first assignment was to take a plane down to Bristol, a short distance from Bath, and when I got there I heard a lot about the raid on the resort town. It had taken place at nine o'clock the night before. . . . I was given another plane to bring back to Ratcliffe, but before returning I flew over Bath and observed the heavy damage the Germans had done.

Eddie Grundstrom, a boy from Springfield, Massachusetts, was one of the few Yankees in the A.T.A. who never signed Sandy Wells' "guid book," and for a few minutes one Saturday morning as he cavorted over the field at Prestwick, Scotland, I was convinced that the jinx had caught up with him at last.

There was a Lockheed-Hudson, a beautiful new American-built twin-engine bomber, standing among the planes on the field as "Grumpy" and I walked over to the operations office to get our delivery chits. Up to that time Grumpy hadn't flown a Lockheed-Hudson; as he stood admiring its lines, a hungry look came into his eyes. "I'm going to ask for that baby," he said. When he saw the surprised expression on my face he broke into a run. He evidently figured I wanted it, too, and would be sure to get it unless he got in his bid first. By the time I reached the office, he had the chit in his hand and was grinning triumphantly as he passed me on the way to the plane. The reason I had looked surprised was simply that

Grumpy was new on twin-engine aircraft and had always said he preferred single-motor jobs.

There was an Airacobra standing on the field. Glancing around to see if there were any other little pilots on hand besides myself, I couldn't find any, so I knew what I would be flying. A special ruling had been made in regard to those particular planes because of their small cockpits. No pilot weighing more than 170 pounds was allowed to fly them, and because they weren't very popular in the A.T.A. anyway, all the boys immediately began taking on weight. I couldn't get above 165, however, so whenever there was an Airacobra to be flown I drew it.

By the time I got my chit and talked for a few minutes with the boys in the office, Grumpy had the bomber warmed up and was ready to go. I came out on the field in time to give him "thumbs up." Grumpy made a nice take-off, climbing to about a thousand feet in a wide sweep around the field. Then he did a little practicing: right and left banks, steep turns, shallow dives and slow climbs. Everything seemed to be going all right. I finally told a mechanic to warm up my ship, and I gave my attention to checking its instruments and controls. I had practically forgotten about Grumpy until suddenly I heard both his engines abruptly cut out.

I looked up. There was the big Lockheed-Hudson at about eight hundred feet and falling fast, both props motionless. I jumped out of my plane and yelled for the crash crew—unnecessarily because they were already rushing for their equipment—and then I stood paralyzed

as the bomber plunged toward the ground. "Do something! Do something!" I could hear myself shouting at Grumpy, but the plane kept on coming.

And then, miraculously, at less than two hundred feet, the left motor caught again, and by gunning it violently Grumpy cut his descent and forced the plane into a labored climb. After a moment the second motor started up, and Grumpy climbed to one thousand feet, circled the field once more, dipped his wings, and headed off to the south to deliver the plane.

That was the most incredible part of the whole performance. Neither I nor any of the others at the field could believe that anyone would be dumb enough to do anything with that plane but land it and get it fixed. If Grumpy didn't know enough to do that, certainly the copilot with him should have been able to talk him into it. But there they were, already almost out of sight, on their way to a field some two hundred miles away—with engines that had cut out on them simultaneously and almost caused their deaths.

I heard the real facts of the case a few days later, but not from Grumpy. He told the story only once, with much embarrassment, when he delivered the plane at the East Coast base; but it was related and improved upon for weeks thereafter by half the men in the A.T.A.

Right on top of the throttle-block or control column of a Lockheed-Hudson, directly in front of the pilot, are two little red buttons. Over them, to protect their mechanism from dust and to prevent their being accidentally

touched, is a small pyrolex window or casing. That window was doing a lot of vibrating in Grumpy's plane as he circled the field at Prestwick, and it made him nervous. He made several attempts to stop its jiggling; when nothing else did the trick he finally slammed his fist down on it, hoping to bend it and thus tighten its fit and stop its vibration.

The window bent so far under his blow, however, that both red buttons were pushed down. Immediately both propellers "feathered" and the engines were automatically cut out. The purpose of the feathering buttons was to enable a pilot, when one engine failed, to adjust the blades of that engine's propeller so that they cut the air like knives instead of presenting an angled surface which would cause resistance and "windmilling" of the dead engine. The buttons were never intended to be used when the engine was working, and therefore had an automatic emergency device connected with them to cut the engine out the instant either button was pushed.

Between the time Grumpy pushed the buttons at one thousand feet and came out of his plunge at two hundred feet he had learned all there was to know about feathering and unfeathering a propeller. When the engines cut out, he grabbed the instruction sheet to find out what he had done. How he read the dope that fast even he could never explain, but just in time to save two lives, both his own and his co-pilot's, he snatched off the pyrolex window, released the buttons, and re-started his motors.

"Grumpy" Grundstrom returned to the States after he had completed his contract with the A.T.A. and spent a few months visiting his family; then he returned to England on a second contract. I am told that he still declined to sign Sandy Wells' "guid book." He had been flying only two months under his second contract when a plane he was ferrying crashed in Ireland, carrying him to his death.

Ed Coe, an Indiana boy based with us at Ratcliffe Airdrome, was a happy-go-lucky relief-seeker cut from the same cloth as Al Gingiss and the royal-duck hunter, Steve Bevell. Coe's particular talent, however, didn't depend on finding an occasional plane with loaded guns; he had a technique entirely his own that gave him all the "relief" he needed. It was simply *noise*; making the most noise he possibly could with an airplane. The procedure went under various names after others in the A.T.A. began taking it up; and "buzzing" and "shooting up" airdromes became a popular sport.

The idea was to come in slow over the hangars of any convenient field, or preferably over the administration office, and just as you were directly over the target, push hard on the throttle. The effect with a single-motor ship was to rattle the windows in the building and scare the occupants half out of their wits. With a multi-motored job you could accomplish even more.

I enjoyed the fun in a mild sort of way until one day Coe stopped me on the field at Ratcliffe, pointing with suppressed excitement to one of the new Mosquito

bomber-fighter jobs standing on the runway. "That's the hottest shooter-upper in the business, Gen," he said. "Try to get one. You'll have the time of your life."

He was right. My first experience "buzzing" with a Mosquito proved to be much more than mild entertainment.

The Mosquito is a twin-engine plane with more outright power and sharp performance than anything I had flown up to that time. When you open the throttle on one of those babies you have enough stuff to handle a plane twice its size and weight and enough noise to send shivers down the spine of a "buzz" fan.

I didn't get a chit on a Mosquito until several days after Coe had told me about them. Then I delivered a plane to Bristol and was given a Mosquito to take up to Norwich, a flight that enabled me to pass directly over the Ratcliffe Airdrome. I knew that Coe had been given a short hop that morning and figured he would probably be back at Ratcliffe by the time I would be passing there. I decided to demonstrate for the old master that I could do as neat a job of "buzzing" as he could himself.

The plane was everything Coe had said it was, and when I swept in low over the administration building at Ratcliffe and opened the throttles, I could picture our usually good-natured commanding officer, Captain MacDonald, throwing himself under the desk for fear I was coming through the roof. As a matter of fact, I went a little farther than Coe usually did by changing the pitch of the propeller to fine just as I pushed the throttle. The

noise was terrific. I could feel the vibration in the seat of my pants, through two inches of cushion.

When I got back to Ratcliffe the next day Captain Mac called me in and pointed to a window over his desk that had no glass in it.

"You better get that fixed, Captain," I said, wondering naively why he was showing it to me. "You might catch cold."

"Is that a fact?" inquired the Captain icily. "Well, why didn't you think of that yesterday when you shattered it with that damn foolishness of yours?"

My apologies were useless—for a quite sufficient reason. An Air Vice Marshal of the R.A.F. had been sitting in conference at Captain MacDonald's desk at the moment I had "buzzed" the place, and the conference had been interrupted for five minutes while the Marshal dusted the flecks of glass off his sleeve.

"You're grounded—suspended from the service, Genovese," Captain Mac snapped. "For two days!"

That might seem like pretty mild punishment, but it isn't. One doesn't go up to London to take in a few shows during the time he's grounded. He reports to the base at the same time each morning and sits around twiddling his thumbs as the other lads take off and come in. He stays there all day, and at night he goes back home and listens to the other boys talk about what they had seen and done all day. The following morning he reports to the base for another endless day of boredom.

In my case it worked out with a delightful final twist. I

reported to the airdrome the following morning and took the dunce chair in the administration office. Along about eleven o'clock, the sky, which had been clear for several days past, began to cloud. By midafternoon it was terrible; you couldn't see across the field, the fog was so thick. All the pilots who had gone out during the morning got word of conditions at Ratcliffe, and they all either stayed where they were or took deliveries to other parts of the country.

The weather was still soupy the next morning, and there were only three other pilots on hand. Then a call came in for a Wellington bomber, needed immediately over at Norwich on the East Coast. Captain MacDonald looked at the names of the A.T.A. men available—and then he looked at me.

"There isn't a man here who's experienced with Wellington's, Genovese," he said. "Except you."

"Is that a fact, sir?" I said.

"Yes, that's a fact," he said, obviously annoyed at my indifference. "And I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll just scratch off this suspension of yours—expunge it from your record—and then you can deliver the plane."

The putty wasn't dry yet on the new window over his desk, and I looked at it morosely. "No, Captain," I said. "I feel too bad about that window. I'll just sit here and take my punishment like a man."

The Captain quietly seethed the rest of the afternoon. Every time he glanced out of his nice new window and saw the Wellington standing there on the runway he

glared at me with renewed rage, but there was nothing for him to do. It wasn't the kind of weather that anyone would be expected to fly in anyway, and there was certainly no reason why a man under suspension should be expected to take the job.

The next morning, reading the newspaper at breakfast at Ratcliffe Hall, I ran across a little item on an inside page. The Germans had bombed and strafed the R.A.F. base at Norwich in thick fog the previous afternoon, intermittent action taking place between 3:30 and 4:00 P.M. If I had taken the Wellington as Captain Mac asked me to, I would have been trying an instrument approach at Norwich along about 3:35.

When I was offered a new contract with the A.T.A. early in June of 1942 I declined, and looking back now I know that it was principally one incident that made me decide to return to the States. I liked instrument flying, and, although it was against A.T.A. rules to fly without ground contact—that is, to fly entirely by instruments—I had done a lot of it in England. A pilot had to if he was going to deliver his ships with minimum risk to himself and to his plane, and I had consistently refused to take unnecessary chances myself just because the ignorance of instrument flying on the part of some A.T.A. pilots had necessitated the ruling.

It was toward the end of May; an order had come through to Castle Bromich, where I happened to be at the moment, for a large number of fighter planes to be delivered to the field at Kirkbride. The job called for a

taxi plane to accompany the flights and bring the pilots back, and I was asked to do the taxi work, flying a De-Haviland Rapide twin-engine ship which could accommodate half a dozen or more passengers.

An English chap, First Officer Gill, rode with me on the shuttle flights back and forth between Castle Bromich and Kirkbride, and we were on our last trip, coming back to Bromich with five pilots in the cabin, when we ran into cloud formation that extended down to within a couple of hundred feet of the ground. I tried to get under it—following the rules—and couldn't without serious danger because of hills in the district that I knew rose as high as eight hundred feet. So I started to climb up through the stuff, hoping to get above it.

We didn't have far to go—about sixty miles from where we were at the time—and it would have been easy enough to bring the plane in on instruments. But with those five new pilots with me I knew there would be complaints if I didn't get out of the clouds. Suddenly, without warning, the vacuum pump failed and all my blind flying instruments went dead. I knew I was at 1800 feet when it happened and I was sure I could hold the plane at that level, flying by the seat of my pants, but if I tried to gain more altitude without instruments and my air-speed indicator frozen, I wouldn't know how much I was gaining—or how little—and my reckoning for the descent would be thrown off.

Gill looked at me, obviously concerned. "What are you going to do, Gen?" he asked.

"I'm going to stay in the clouds," I said. "It's the only thing to do."

Gill was satisfied. He was bright enough to figure out the sense of that for himself. The kids in the cabin, however, were remembering the A.T.A.'s rules, and in a couple of minutes one of them was trying to make his way forward to investigate.

I could feel the trim of the ship changing as the distribution of weight in the cabin shifted, and I turned to Gill: "Tell those bastards to sit down—just as they were!"

Gill moved back into the cabin and shouted something that I couldn't understand—except for the one word that I had used—and after a moment he came back. He was a husky lad, broad-shouldered and thick in the body. He was rubbing the knuckles of his right hand and grinning as he slid into the seat behind me. "They'll be all right, I think," he said.

We broke out of the clouds just before we reached Castle Bromich, and our landing was smooth and uneventful. But before I could take off on my return trip to the base at Ratcliffe the next day, the officer in charge at Bromich called me in and said that I had been reported by two of his pilots for flying in clouds.

"That's right, sir," I said. "I did—and I'll do it again any time I have to."

"Blind flying is against the rules of the Air Transport Auxiliary, Captain," the officer said sternly.

"I know it is," I replied. "But it's against my rules to get killed if I can help it."

I then told him the story just as it had happened. I don't know what he did with the report from his pilots, but I never heard of it again.

There are stuffed shirts in England, just as there are everywhere else in the world. And then there are guys like First Officer Gill, as British clear through as anyone I've ever met, who got a real kick out of smacking the principal agitator of those two pilots on the jaw. There was the old Home Guard, seventy if he was a day, who patrolled the streets of Wigton wearing the remnants of his Boer War uniform and carrying an ancient model .30 caliber rifle, who fired at a German plane one day and shot the pilot straight through the neck.

Real people, most of the British; and you can't say they don't have a sense of humor. I was delivering a Spitfire one day, and the clouds were so low I was flying only about fifty feet off the ground, following the railroad track across a long stretch of level country between Norwich and Peterborough. As I approached a watchman's tower at a highway crossing along the track I saw the old keeper lean out and wave a green lantern at me, and as I neared the crossing the old fellow grinned and swung the gates out across the highway to give me the right of way . . .

I took pride then, and I do now, in the job I did with the A.T.A. I felt that I had made some contribution to the success of a war that was as much ours as it was England's, and I had got into it before a good many of our

people realized how serious our situation was. In many ways I should have liked to renew my contract with the A.T.A., yet I was eternally maddened by that rule against instrument flying. They should have been teaching it to their pilots instead of forbidding them to do it; had they done so many lives might have been saved. And the tendency, at the time my contract was up for renewal, was to really clamp down and enforce the ruling. That was not for me.

CHAPTER TEN

Enemy Submarines Attack

ONE YEAR from the day Al Privensal and I signed up with the A.T.A. in Montreal we completed our contracts and started making plans to return home. We had been asked to stay another year, but the incentive wasn't as strong as it had been a year before. The A.T.A. was well-manned, there were many applicants anxious to fill the openings that we would leave; our salaries of six hundred dollars per month were good, but it seemed probable that equally good or better pay would be obtainable in the States. Since Pearl Harbor most of the Americans in the A.T.A. had felt a yearning to get back home, and Pri and I were no different from the rest. Al Gingiss had completed his contract in June and had returned to Chicago. Skippy Lane had finished his term and was spending a few days with friends up at Prestwick before heading back to California. Privensal and I de-

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cided to return to the States with Skippy. When we signed out and received our final pay checks, we went up to London to arrange our passage and have a brief vacation, waiting for Skippy to join us.

The torpedoing of ships in the North Atlantic in the summer of 1942 was a murderous thing; wholesale sinkings were being reported every month. Nevertheless, we decided to return home by sea rather than by air. We could have flown back to Canada the same way we had come over, but there was a situation in the trans-Atlantic Ferry Command at that time that made a sluggish old freighter and its lifeboats look like a pretty good thing by comparison.

The British authorities in charge of the Ferry Command knew that getting new bombers over to England from America was the major item in the Ferry business, but they had the odd notion that getting the pilots back again for the next shipment was of minor importance. So a goodly number of the taxi planes flying back to Canada with cargoes of pilot-passengers were being flown by almost wholly inexperienced pilots. Inexcusable accidents were occurring with tragic frequency. The situation became so bad the United States Government sent over an investigating committee to determine the cause. It was while that investigation was under way, before anything of a corrective nature had been done, that we were offered the chance to ride back in a Ferry Command taxi. We cordially declined.

We were to meet Skippy at the Mayfair Hotel on

August 2. Toward the evening of that day he called us there on the phone.

"Where are you—downstairs?" I asked him.

"Hell, no!" he said. "I'm at Prestwick and the fog is so thick I can't get out of the damn place."

"The trains are running," I said. "And you'd better hop one pretty fast. We're to be in Liverpool tomorrow noon, ready to sail on a moment's notice."

"You mean they won't tell you the sailing time?"

"Hell, no! This is war, kid," I laughed. "We're going in a convoy. We've got to be there, ready and waiting. It might be twenty minutes or maybe a week. They'll call us at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool some time after noon tomorrow—that's all we know."

"All right," Skippy said. "I'll meet you there."

He didn't, as it turned out. That is, he didn't meet us at the hotel. Pri and I sat around the hotel lobby in Liverpool all the next afternoon wondering which would come first, Skippy or the call from the dock, when a few minutes before six o'clock the call came to get down to the dock.

We were standing on the deck thinking what a hell of a note it was that poor Skippy had missed the boat, when he came tearing around the corner of a warehouse, still wearing his flying clothes, his arms loaded with baggage. A mechanic named MacDonald, from the Speke Air-drome just outside Liverpool, rushed along at his heels with some more baggage.

"Hey, hold on a minute!" Skippy yelled.

The sailors at the gangplank grabbed the tie ropes just

as the dock wallopers were starting to drag the plank ashore. The captain standing on the bridge shouted something that sounded like a Cockney curse—and undoubtedly was—but the sailors gave Skippy enough time to leap aboard and snatch his bags from the mechanic as they were handed up from the dock. It wasn't thirty seconds later that the freighter's screws began to turn and she heaved out into the darkening harbor.

"By gosh!" Skippy exclaimed, looking at Pri and me with open astonishment. "I almost didn't make it! I almost got left behind!"

Pri frowned at Skippy, studying him. Finally he said, "Lane, you amaze me. You catch on to things so fast."

The story came out later as the three of us sat in our stateroom, Skippy and Pri concentrating heavily on the first of the many bottles of Scotch to be polished off on that trip.

"After I talked to you last night," Skippy said, "I called the station and found that the last Liverpool train had just pulled out and that there wouldn't be another until noon today. So I called Eddie Coe at White Waltham and asked him to pack my stuff and get it down to Speke first thing this morning. Then I stayed up most of the night pleading with that damned fog to get the hell up off the ground—but morning came and it was still thick as putty.

"I was getting ready to catch the noon train when the stuff started to lift, so I hung around. And about ten minutes after train time it got thick again.

"Petach was up there with me, and finally, about two o'clock, the moment the soup began to thin again, he took a chit on a Hampden bound for White Waltham and we piled in. When we got over the field here it was all putty again, and he had to make six tries for an instrument landing.

"I called Mac from Prestwick and he had a jeep ready when I landed—and boy, what a ride we had coming down to those docks!"

The convoy assembled during the night as we plowed our way through the Irish Sea and up the narrows of the North Channel. By nine o'clock the next morning, as the north coast of Ireland faded out of sight behind us, we were forty ships strong, riding six abreast and seven deep with about fifteen hundred yards between each ship. On our right and left flanks rode two destroyers; aside from the guns mounted on our decks, that was all the protection we had.

Captain Pengelly, the gruff old skipper of the S.S. *Tilapa*, our ship—the same who had cursed Skippy the night before for delaying his sailing a fraction of a second—turned out to be a very decent gent when we got to know him. He took us up to the bridge and showed us the workings of the ship, his controls, compasses and charts.

"You don't have to know much about navigation to sail in a convoy, I suppose," Skippy said after Pengelly had been explaining his charts and instruments for some fifteen minutes. His intention was clearly to rile the old

man in retaliation for the cussing-out he had taken, but the captain took it very quietly.

"No, ye truly don't," he replied. "Give 'im a clear day an' a smooth sea, and a airplane navigator could probably keep us pretty well on coursè."

I climbed the mast to the crow's nest the second day out, but if it hadn't been for Lane and Privensal watching me from below I wouldn't have gone more than halfway. Every slightest motion of the ship multiplied itself into a huge roll as I climbed farther and farther up the mast; even before I had reached the nest I was half the time looking straight down upon the sea with the deck of the freighter far to my left or right. When I finally pushed up through the trap door of the little canvas-walled basket a few feet below the top of the mast, I took one look over the side and then sat right down, where I couldn't see anything but the canvas. There was a musty old magazine lying in one corner of the nest that I picked up and started to read. It was the only way to get my mind off that dizzy pendulous motion and the prospect of climbing down again. I read every story in the old rag—all detective yarns—and it wasn't until two hours later, when I had finally mustered courage for my descent, that I noticed the date on the tattered and weatherbeaten cover: July, 1917! There were German spies in every American closet then just as there are now, according to the fiction writers, so I thought I had been reading pretty up-to-date stuff.

There were seven other passengers on board, all of

them European refugees on their way to safety in the United States. None of them could talk English. One was a French girl, and I practiced my own smattering of French on her for a while, but soon gave it up. Annette was a lot more fun when we just lounged on the deck in the moonlight and didn't talk at all.

The third night out I was standing at the rail of the rear deck, wholly absorbed in the silent mystery being performed by the forty ships to our left and rear, when Pri and Skippy emerged from the bar and joined me. The only communication between ships was by signal lights. Wireless was not permitted. "This is a good show," I said. "The tubs on both right and left flanks have been flashing signals like mad for the past ten minutes. The destroyers were up front when it started. Now they're way astern . . ."

"S prob'ly a summarine," Skippy said, swaying gently with the motion of the ship. "'F we had single-'spanion boilers we'd ge' way like 'at!" He snapped his fingers to show how a single-expansion boiler would enable us to dart across the water like a PT boat.

"You and those damn single-expansion boilers!" Pri snorted. "Just because you worked in a boiler factory once you think you're an expert."

"Never worked 'n a boiler fac'ry," Skippy replied, shaking his head with heavy emphasis. "Was firs' mate on a freighter. Damn good freighter, too. Bes' damn freighter in a whole worl'. Had single-'spanion boilers."

"Well, you're talking to an expert when you're talking

to me," Privensal said with dignity. Pri was able to drink twice as much as any ordinary man and never lose perfect control over his tongue. "I," he said, "am a boiler engineer. I know all about boilers and a triple-expansion boiler is far superior to the best single ever made. Furthermore, a single-expansion boiler . . ."

This had been going on every night, hour after hour, so I felt no compunction about breaking in. "Look, you jerks," I said. "This is no time to argue about boilers. I'll bet we're going to be attacked."

"So what?" Privensal said. "I can't do anything about it. I'm helpless. Absolutely helpless." He put a hand on Skippy's shoulder. "Am I right, Skippy old boy?"

"Right's right c'n be," Skippy agreed. "Me too. I'm heplish. Abshlutely heplish."

They shook hands on that and wandered back to the bar.

After a while the flashing of signals between the ships ceased, the destroyers resumed their normal positions on either side of the convoy, and we plowed slowly on across the sea.

The next night I was at the same place along the rail when the frantic signaling between ships began again. It was about ten o'clock and Pri and Skippy were in the bar—had been since after supper—but just as the two destroyers started dropping to the rear they came out on deck. They arrived in time for the fireworks.

I had just turned from watching the destroyer far back on the left of the convoy and was glancing from one ship

to another along the outside row. The first ship in the line was blinking a signal; I was trying to decipher it when suddenly the signal light gave a violent jerk, leaped high into the air, and then, as its bulb began to dim, fell toward the sea.

There was a moment of silence, and although I knew instinctively what had happened, I couldn't quite believe it. That ship had been torpedoed—the signal tower had been blasted out of the deck!

As the dull thud of the explosion under water finally reached our ears, our own ship was already changing its course, making a sharp turn to the right. A sailor on the bridge shot off a flare. Flares began popping up from all the other ships in the convoy. The sky took an eerie, unsteady half-light that made a nightmarish spectacle of the choppy black waves and the scattering flotilla of black-hulled ships all around us.

Even as we were going into our turn, the ship on our right lurched suddenly to leeward and then seemed to leap out of the water; as it hung there an instant in the wavery light of the flares, it broke completely in two. In a matter of seconds lifeboats were being lowered over the side and passengers and crew were leaping into the water. It wasn't five minutes before the broken hulk was completely under the waves.

Skippy and Pri watched the show with interest, but with surprisingly little alarm. The way my own nerves were jumping and my heart pounding, I almost wished I had as much Scotch in my belly as they did.

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More than a score of torpedoes were thrown into the convoy during the two-hour attack, and when the submarines were finally driven off by the destroyers' depth charges eleven of our ships had gone down. Our own ship was undamaged, but several of the thirty-one others that continued on with us to Halifax, Nova Scotia, were severely crippled and slowed the pace of the entire lot. Very few lives were lost, because the ships that were sunk were all forward in the flotilla, and the ships following them picked up the survivors. Had any of those in the last row been sunk it would have been just too bad. The rule of safety followed in every convoy is "Keep going!"—and if your ship is last in line there is no sister ship that can hold to that hard and fast rule and still do you any good.

The crossing took fourteen days, but aside from a few "alerts" and mild scares the balance of the voyage was quite uneventful. We landed at Halifax on August 18, were in Montreal the next night after a long train ride, and from there I took a plane for New York. It was going to be good to see my mother and the family, and the parting with Pri and Skippy was easy—almost casual. "I'll be seein' you!" and "Take it easy!"—that was the way it went. We were back home, once again among our own people. The elements of danger and living in a strange place—all those things and scores of others that had made us feel like brothers for over a year—were lost somehow in the sheer joy of being home. We shook hands and laughed and slapped each other on the back; but we were all pre-

occupied with thoughts of getting back into our own family circles.

It's amazing, almost incredible, how short a time that feeling lasts after one does get back in his "family circle." I'm told it was the same after the last war; and no doubt it will be the same after this one. You come home as fast as you can, and when you get there you kiss everybody and do a lot of glib, happy talking, and you flop into a big easy chair and you think to yourself, "Oh, brother, what a life, what a life!" You pack a lifetime of happiness into those few hours of the first night home—and when you wake up the next morning you begin to wonder what the hell you are going to do now.

My nerves had become conditioned during those months in England to remain under strict control in almost any kind of circumstances. They had been relaxed and at ease, yet constantly alert. The danger that had existed at all times—from engine failure in the air, or enemy attack, or faulty instruments, or from bombing and strafing on the ground at the airdromes—all that had become routine, and my nerves had become adjusted to it.

Now I was home, and life in the States in the summer of 1942—seven months after Pearl Harbor, with the country facing powerful enemies on both sides of the world—was still a life of comparative peace. New Yorkers were talking a good war—over their cocktails—and the newspaper editors were thoughtfully discussing the need for

rationing, or castigating the "bureaucrats" who fought to impose it. Debutantes made the society pages when they took jobs in factories. The scarcity of silk stockings was a major concern of American women everywhere. Air-raid alerts were beginning to be a nuisance; the nightly blackout had been fun at first, but now it was irritating, and people complained that the dimmed-out stop lights were hard to see. Pleasure driving on the still liberal gasoline allowance was being made downright uncomfortable with those silly lights.

This was America embattled. After what I had seen in England it was hard to believe that we were really at war.

Al Gingiss was in New York when I arrived there, and we spent a lot of time together, visiting the night spots and trying to get back into the kind of life we had lived before. But there was a hollowness to it now; the music and laughter and wild spending of wartime's easy money in the jammed restaurants, cocktail bars and night clubs of Manhattan wasn't half the fun I had thought it would be. Even Gingiss, the airborne hunter of King George VI's ducks, found New York's prewar brand of hilarity slightly depressing, and after a week of it he returned to Chicago.

Pan-American Airways had been ferrying planes to England, Russia and China under contract with the Government, and I decided to approach them about a job. A couple of days after Gingiss left town I went down to their New York office in the Chrysler Building and talked to Captain Hal Sweet. He was much impressed with the

flying experience I had had, but he gloomily informed me that the ferrying job was soon to be taken over by the Army.

"You'd probably get a good commission if you applied for one," he said. "The Army needs fellows like you who are already trained in this kind of work."

"You're probably right," I said, "but the Army and I parted company some time ago."

I told him about going to Randolph Field and being washed out as a "dangerous flier." Before going to Randolph, I told him, I had spent several thousand dollars over a period of years giving myself the training that would make me a top-rank pilot. When an opportunity came along to go to Randolph and get further valuable training, I had taken it with the thought in mind that all the flying I would do afterwards for the Army would be partial repayment for the investment made in me by the Government. But when they washed me out I was right back on my own. During my time with Lockheed in California and with Brewster Aircraft in New York I had spent most of my earnings on lessons in instrument flying and navigation, and on renting planes to put what I learned into practice in the air.

"The Government figures it costs something like twenty thousand dollars to make a top-rank pilot out of a raw cadet," I said, "and that's probably right, because they do it on the grand scale, using the best planes and equipment and hiring the best available men for instructors. The Government makes a huge investment in its

Army and Navy pilots, and those boys have an obligation that I don't have at all. Flying is a business with me, and I've sunk a lot of my own money in that business. As long as I can earn a good return on the investment by doing essential civilian flying, that's what I'm going to do."

Sweet thought my reasoning was sound, and before I left he asked me to call him again in a few days; Pan-American was adding some more planes to the airline it operated for General Chiang Kai-shek between India and China and they were going to need some more pilots.

"You mean for that trans-Himalaya run?" I asked.

"That's the one," Sweet replied. "It's the toughest air route in the world, but flying it pays real dough . . ."

There still was nothing definite on the deal when I called back a few days later. Meanwhile Gingiss had written suggesting that I come to Chicago for a while. I left New York August 30 and spent most of September in the Windy City. I bought a beautiful red Packard convertible coupe a few days after I arrived—mostly for fun but partly for transportation back and forth between the Parkway Hotel where Gingiss lived and the Municipal Airport. I wanted to be sure of my instrument flying before making any definite move on the China-India deal, so I arranged to do a lot of flying during my stay in Chicago, and before I went back to New York I took the necessary tests and won an official instrument rating.

Gingiss was much interested in what I told him about my meeting with Hal Sweet. On about the twentieth of September he went down to New York and had a confer-

ence with Sweet himself. He happened to arrive there the very day the deal had been okayed, so I got a wire from him to be in New York by October 1 for a physical examination and to sign on the dotted line. He had already made up his mind to go and that was all the persuasion I needed. I agreed to be there, and then wired Skippy Lane and Al Privensal outlining the proposition. They both replied immediately that they would be in New York on the first.

In the summer of 1942, just after I returned to the States, the Japs invaded Burma, cutting off China's vital supply route, the Burma Road. The cutting of the road didn't, perhaps, mean much to most Americans, including myself; but it meant a great deal to people higher up and better informed than most of us then were. It meant, conceivably, the difference between keeping China in the war as an active and valuable ally in our struggle with Japan, and losing her, a starved and worn-out victim, to our common enemy.

Pan-American Airways had a stake in China, having established there as far back as 1937 several bases for a small and extremely costly commercial air service. Pan-American was looking ahead then to a day when China would be prosperous, progressive and therefore profitable territory for air commerce. Pan-American was still looking ahead, still confident of China's future, even after Japan had seized the Burma Road and, to all outward

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appearances, broken China's lifeline, its last commercial connecting link with the outside world.

China had endured a blockade of its western coast for years, but had been able to do so only because its back door was open. Guns, machinery, trucks, food, and munitions had been flowing in a constant—although thin—stream up through Burma from Rangoon on the Bay of Bengal, along the tortuous route of the Burma Road, and thus into the interior of China.

Now, with the Japanese seizure of French Indo-China and the cutting off of the Burma Road at its uppermost point in Burma, that back door was virtually closed. It would have been completely so had it not been for Pan-American Airways and the far-seeing, indomitable Chinese leader, Chiang Kai-shek.

Between these two—Kai-shek on the one hand and William Bond, Pan-American's representative in Burma and China—the loss of the Burma Road was quickly minimized. Astute men, unafraid to face facts, they had anticipated the loss of the road and had planned well to circumvent disaster.

In Upper Assam, almost due north of Rangoon and within an even shorter distance of Calcutta, they had established the eastern base of Chiang Kai-shek's newly founded, personally owned but Pan-American-operated, China National Airways Corporation. From Dinjan, in Assam, China National's air route led directly east over the most difficult flying terrain in the world, across Upper Burma and the Jap-held territory surrounding the cap-

tured Burma Road, and terminating seven hundred miles inside China at Kunming, in Yunnan Province.

The only problem facing Bond and Chiang Kai-shek after they had laid out that route was finding men who would be willing to fly it. They were prepared to pay pilots from a thousand to fifteen hundred dollars per month, requiring them to work only three weeks out of every four, but pilots still were not swarming in.

No doubt that is why, when Gingiss, Privensal, Skippy Lane and I were being interviewed in New York, we heard more about the beautiful Chinese girls who clustered around American flyers in droves, pleading to share their affections, than we did about the hazards of flying freight and personnel across the snow-capped Himalaya mountains.

I can hear Hal Sweet now, as he leaned across his desk and said, his voice husky with emotion, "Boys, I'm telling you, there's nothing like it in all the world. Your pockets lined with money—plenty of liquor to drink—servants always at your beck and call, and so cheap you could support a hundred of them. And girls. Chinese girls—beautiful, well educated, English-speaking even, lots of them. And you can buy 'em outright! All yours and for keeps—for forty bucks!"

There were a lot of factors that entered into my decision to fly for C.N.A.C., but I can't deny that the rosy picture painted by Hal Sweet, and decorated in spots by my friend Owen Johnson, had considerable to do with the outcome. On the other hand, the hazards of the route

didn't seem too serious, because I was confident now of my instrument flying; the work was an important contribution to the Allied war effort; it paid better than any other flying job in the world; and it would be far more interesting and provide much more valuable experience than commercial flying in the States.

If I could combine all the things I liked—instrument flying, difficult flying, playing an important part in the war, and making money—if I could do all that and have beautiful Chinese girls fighting for my affections at the same time—hell, I had no alternative!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Recruited by Chiang Kai-shek

A TRIP HALFWAY around the world would be a pretty interesting experience under any circumstances, but during wartime it becomes something unforgettable. Pan-American had its own planes covering a large part of the route to India, but for the rest of it arrangements had to be made to get us passage on Army planes. That called for a complicated and long-range type of coordination, but Pan-American did it. The entire trip, from Miami, Florida, to Karachi, on the west coast of India, went off without a single hitch.

Al Privensal had run into a rather delicate situation upon his return from England, and as result of that he didn't leave with us but followed some three weeks later, joining us at Dinjan. It seems that about twenty minutes after he, Skippy Lane, and I shook hands in Montreal

after our return from England and set out on our separate ways home, Pri bumped into a little brown-eyed French-Canadian vision and completely lost his bearings. He forgot entirely where he had been going, and for three whole weeks love held him there in Montreal, with his head in the clouds and Yvonne in his arms.

By the end of the third week, he began to come around to normal again and mentioned to Yvonne that he guessed he had better get back to the States, and that he hoped he would be seeing her again some time.

Yvonne blew her pretty top at that. He wasn't going any place. He was staying right there. He was her sweetheart and she would never let him leave her. And for fear he would try to escape in spite of her threats, Yvonne moved right into his hotel room and planted herself on his baggage.

The strategy would have been effective if Pri had had a little more regard for his baggage, but all it meant to him was that he had to leave the stuff there in Montreal. It was not until he got to the United States' border that he realized his passport was in Yvonne's possession. The loss of it didn't interfere with his getting home, but it put a crimp into his dealings with Pan-American. Rather than risk another battle with the brown-eyed bit of French-Canadian dynamite, he decided to regard the passport as lost and apply for another one. That is a slow process, so Gingiss and Lane and I left him to his troubles and went on ahead.

There was an article in one of the New York papers

about our signing up with Pan-American to fly for C.N.A.C. mentioning that we had all flown in England with the Ferry Command. The night the article appeared I received a call from a girl who exclaimed that she was engaged to Jimmy Brown, one of the boys we had flown with in England, and wanted to tell us that Jim was in China flying for C.N.A.C., had been there for a couple of months.

That was unexpected good news, and I thanked her for calling. Then she asked if I would mind delivering a present to Jimmy for her, and of course I said I would be glad to. The next day a messenger brought me a little toy elephant, a tiny blue gingham affair with a long trunk and big floppy ears. I had to laugh, thinking of Jimmy carrying that thing with him in the cockpit of his plane; but the more I looked at it the less I laughed. Before I finally packed it away in my suitcase I was beginning to envy Jimmy and wish I had a little toy elephant just like it. The darned thing looked like a really high-powered good-luck charm. Even my death's head ring, old "Abou," didn't have quite the stuff that elephant had, and I knew that Jimmy's girl must have felt the same way about it and couldn't resist sending it to her fiancé.

We left LaGuardia Airport on October 12 for Miami. It was not certain when our plane would leave for Natal, Brazil—the first stop outside the States—so we loafed around the town having a good time, wondering how the Army Air Forces' taking over Miami Beach would affect things there after the war. It seemed as though nine-

tenths of the people on the streets and in the restaurants were in uniform.

On the morning of October 15 we got word at the hotel to hustle out to the airport, which we did. Already in the plane when we arrived were eight Army officers. I didn't attach any special significance to that, but Al Gingiss did. We had just seated ourselves in the cabin of the big Douglas DC-4 (a type of plane, incidentally, originally designed for Japan!) when Al leaned over toward me, cocked his head at the brass hats up front, and said, "Something's cookin', cookies. Maybe we should have stayed home."

"Nuts," said Skippy Lane. "They're just out for the ride."

As we took off and headed out across the Caribbean, I glanced from the window, watching Florida and the United States fade into the distance. I was paying no attention to the brass hats except to notice indifferently that they were all very quiet and preoccupied. Gingiss wasn't looking out the window; he was studying the Army men. And after a while he said, "Gen, I'll lay you a little bet. Those guys are going to Africa—and something's cookin'."

"Okay," I said, "I'll bet you a nickel. That's all it's worth because I don't care where they're going. We have Army and Navy men all over the world," I went on, "so what's a few more hopping over to Africa?"

Gingiss was right. We flew straight through to Natal on the easternmost tip of Brazil, and twenty-four hours

later took off in a completely blacked-out trans-Atlantic Clipper for Freetown, North Africa. We flew at night and we flew fast, making no stops, not even at Ascension Island, the regular refueling station in mid-Atlantic. At five o'clock the next morning we put down at Fisherman's Lake, Freetown.

"There's no need of hurrying like that for us," Gingiss remarked to Lane and me as we stepped out of the plane just behind the Army men. "I tell you there's something cookin'."

A pair of jeeps were on hand to take us from the sea-plane dock, and after a short and extremely rough ride over newly constructed roads, we pulled up in front of American Army headquarters on the fringe of a wide landing strip that had been cut right into the heart of the jungle.

I was beginning to think Gingiss was right. The American Army was in strange places and it was doing strange things.

The reception given us was no less cordial than that accorded the brass hats who came over with us, but for us the ceremonies involved simply being offered drinks and then being seated at a table in the dining quarters, where we were served an excellent breakfast by white-coated and well-trained native boys. The brass hats went into immediate conference with the officers of the post, returned shortly to eat a hurried meal, and within an hour they were taking off, amidst a great deal of excitement, in a big Army transport plane.

"You're right, Al," Skippy and I finally conceded. "Something is certainly cookin'."

We were in Calcutta the day the news broke, and I paid Gingiss his nickel. American troops had landed at Oran on the north coast of Africa on November 7—the first important step on the long road to Berlin.

Our own departure from Freetown was almost as speedy as that of the Army men. Before noon we were on our way again, this time in an Army plane, and we flew over the torrid African jungle to Accra on the Gold Coast. We spent the night there, taking off in the morning for a four-hundred-mile jump to Lagos, Nigeria. We had lunch there, the plane was fueled and then we headed north-east across Nigeria and French Equatorial Africa, all the way to Khartoum on the Nile, in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. We laid over in Khartoum a full day, then went on to Asmara. From there, after another day's lay-over, we flew over the Red Sea, across the Arabian Desert and the Gulf of Oman, and landed, the evening of October 24, at Karachi on the west coast of India.

I have never seen a place in all my life as filthy and ugly, as disease-ridden and poverty-stricken, as Karachi, India, in October of 1942. People clothed in foul-smelling rags and with open sores on their bodies oozing blood and pus—children naked and dirty, with emaciated bodies and eyes half closed with festering boils—dogs and pigs and scrawny cows wandering in the streets, lame and crusted with mange. There was no segregation of the sick from the well, of the diseased from the people in good

health. Even lepers walked the streets, shouldering their way through the steaming, smelly throngs.

I came through the same city a year later and scarcely recognized it. The United States Army had established headquarters there, had built hospitals to care for the desperately sick, had segregated diseased persons from the healthy ones, had established a leper colony, and had barred the eternal Indian beggar from certain portions of the city. It was hard for me to believe that so much good could be accomplished in so short a time.

Almost any one of the cities we had seen since leaving the States would have been fun to hang around in for a few days. Natal, Brazil, for instance. Gingiss didn't do very well there during our one-night stand, but Lane and I had the time of our lives. You can't overrate those Brazilian girls. At least you can't overrate the one I found. Curves galore, beautiful big brown eyes, a laugh that was genuine music, and a violence about her that would have been downright dangerous if it hadn't been tempered by affection. And then our plane had to leave after only twenty-four hours.

Freetown, Accra, Lagos—even Khartoum—they were all swell, but we weren't in any of them more than a few hours. And then we found ourselves in filthy, stinking, steaming-hot Karachi, stranded there for eight days.

It's the difference between the East and the West, no doubt. We had been operating on a neat and accurate Pan-American and United States Army schedule up to

the time we were dropped at Karachi. From there on we were dealing with China National Airways. And China National—in everything except delivering war materials from Assam to Kunming—is no different from any other individual or group in the whole of the Far East.

No one at the airport at Karachi knew anything about us or what we were to do, and they quite obviously didn't care who we were or what we did. We got ourselves a room in the city's least lousy-looking hotel and sent a wire to the C.N.A.C. office at Calcutta.

"Pilots Gingiss, Lane and Genovese arrived Karachi. Please advise." Very businesslike. We flashed the wire off and sat down to wait. Ought to give them a couple of hours anyway, we figured.

"This is the Orient, you know," Gingiss said, trying to adapt himself to new conditions. "They might not answer for an hour after they get it."

Three days later we got our reply.

"We may be able to arrange for a plane that you can fly to Calcutta yourselves," the message said. "Will advise."

After seven days of sitting around twiddling our thumbs I became thoroughly disgusted. On the morning of the eighth day I went over to the airport and inquired about getting to Calcutta.

"How soon would you like to leave?" I was asked by the very casual attendant at the passenger office.

"Right away," I replied.

"There's a plane leaving for Calcutta at four o'clock," the fellow said.

"Good," I said. "We're in luck. I guess I dropped in on just the right day."

"The right day?" the fellow repeated, giving me a curious glance. "There are two planes every day for Calcutta."

"Well, by God," I said, "somebody ought to tell the China National outfit about this!"

The fellow gave me that look again, quietly presuming, I suppose, that I was crazy. He handed me three tickets, I paid him and left. Gingiss and Lane were sleeping soundly in the hotel lobby—as was everyone else present—when I returned. They were getting well adjusted to the Oriental routine. I woke them and told them the news, and that afternoon we took off for Calcutta.

I read a little article once that very conclusively proved—and without too much trouble—that even the most high-pressured American businessman had only to be in the Orient for a few months and he would become a lazy sluggard and would forevermore be contemptuous of the American ideal of getting things done quickly. The article cited a batch of examples, and by the time I finished reading the thing I not only believed that that was what always happened, but also thought maybe it was a good thing. And maybe it is. But in William E. Bond, Pan-American's representative in the Far East, we found an exception to the rule.

Mr. Bond wasn't at all upset by the fact that we had

wasted more than a week in Karachi because of the indifference of one of his underlings. He brushed that aside with a flick of the hand, immediately proceeding to business. He got us accommodations at the Great Eastern Hotel and wired the base at Dinjan that we were in Calcutta and ready to start work.

Bond was a good host, and there's no doubt at all that in Gingiss and Lane and myself he had three very enthusiastic visiting firemen. The thought of being stuck in India for a year had sickened us when we saw Karachi, but Calcutta was another story. The western world had injected just enough of itself into Calcutta to lend emphasis to its ancient Oriental beauty. The streets were narrow and winding, and the odd-shaped buildings, with peculiar domes and spires jutting from them at every opportunity, were cramped together in great confusion; but the city had a look of cleanliness about it. The buildings weren't dried out and crumbling under the blistering heat of the sun; they had been well built in the beginning and still looked good. The people moving in leisurely, Oriental ease up and down the streets were nothing like their brothers in Karachi. They dressed better and were busier, more prosperous. The men were skinny, one seldom saw a fat native, but they were not sickly. That it was a city of considerable wealth was evident in the fine automobiles seen in the streets, the many luxuriously equipped hotels, the uniformed policemen, and the infinite number of eating places and saloons.

"You'll get to like Calcutta," Bond told us. "It's a great

place for having fun—and after pushing those planes back and forth across the mountains for three weeks at a stretch you'll be ready for fun!"

How right he was!

Bond is an anomaly in India and China. The reason is, I think, that he isn't annoyed by indifference or slowness on the part of other people; he is simply concerned with never taking part in it himself. He knows he can't change the nature of the people he's working with, so he doesn't try. But by the same token, he knows of no reason why he should change his ways to match theirs. So he works like a fool, does everything with speed and efficiency, and is perfectly satisfied that by so doing he does really save some time in the long run. He does his job the way he thinks it ought to be done; and the people working for him do theirs the way they think theirs should be done. Bond has built a fine organization on that seemingly haphazard basis, and I doubt that anyone in India or China would deny him the credit for making C.N.A.C. the invaluable arm of China's defense that it is today.

A chap named Joe Rosbert flew down from Dinjan the next day in one of the Douglas C-53's to take us up to the base. He was an interesting kid, from somewhere in Pennsylvania originally, but he had been in China for quite a while. He had only been flying for C.N.A.C. a couple of months, but before that he had been one of General Claire Chennault's Flying Tigers. He knew China and he knew planes; it was his knowledge of both that saved his

three of them containing in all about forty beds and double-decked bunks. The fourth room, which was the largest, was the lounge, and around its huge fireplace were grouped half a dozen comfortable leather chairs and an enormous couch. Elsewhere in the room were card tables, writing desks and bookcases, a radio and a phonograph. The favorite record of one of the native servants, Putlao, was an Andrews Sisters' rendition of "Down by the Ohio"; he played it every morning to wake the pilots.

Below the lounge, on the lower floor, were the kitchen and a large dining hall, and outside to the south of the dormitory was a clean patch of lawn which was used for a badminton court.

The entire setting seemed quite civilized, and when the phonograph blared out that night with a hot swing arrangement by Harry James we could almost think we were back home. But the moment the music stopped we could hear the monkeys chattering in the jungle a few yards away, and perhaps a jackal screeching in terror as he fled across the badminton court in the darkness pursued by some jungle creature. Then we knew right well where we were.

We were driven out to the plantation that first day in a station wagon chauffeured by a native boy, after we had checked in at the field with the chief pilot, Captain Woods. As we pulled to a stop in front of the cottage there was a loud shout from the top of the porch stairs. I pushed open the car door, stepped out—and there was

Jimmy Brown, a wide grin on his face as he dashed down the steps to greet us.

"How the hell have you been?" he wanted to know, but he didn't give us a chance to answer, what with all the back-slapping and cussing and laughing. "You birds certainly got yourselves jobs this time," he told us as we climbed the long flight of stairs to the wide front porch. "This isn't like England. If you thought that was bad, you better go home right now."

Gingiss laughed at Jimmy, and brushed off the warning with a wave of his hand. "Trouble with you, kid," Al said, "is you aren't really the flying type. You'd make a better bookkeeper—I told you that in England."

"Ah, rats!" Jimmy said. He was at a loss for a better retort, but only for a moment. "What I mean, Gingiss," he said then, "is that there aren't any ducks to shoot over in this country—and you never have a chance to use a machine gun on floating mines. You never have guns mounted on your plane here at all because they weigh too much and its more important to load the plane with freight."

Gingiss looked down his long nose at Brown and said, "Your reference to my shooting ducks is quite out of order, James. If you will recall, the Accident Committee's report proved that I—"

"Skip it," Jimmy broke in, laughing. "Just keep in mind, though, that when you make a crash landing over here you'll probably be in some bloodthirsty head-hunter's back yard."

Jimmy had a bottle of Scotch in his room and he went to get it. When he returned to the porch I had pulled the little blue elephant out of my suitcase.

"A present from your girl, Jimmy," I said, handing it to him.

"What the hell—" Jimmy exclaimed, staring at the little gingham toy in utter bewilderment. "What does Joan think this is over here—a kindergarten?"

Lane and Gingiss and I were all laughing, and Skippy said, "She tried to get you a tricycle but they aren't making 'em any more."

"It's a good-luck charm, you mutt," I said. "Can't you tell just by looking at it? Doesn't the damn thing holler good luck right at you?"

Jimmy looked blank. "That must be what Joan thought, Gen . . . but, gosh, it just looks like a toy elephant to me."

"Well, it's good luck," I said, "and if you don't want to carry it in your plane I'll carry it in mine. That little bugger has everything."

Jimmy finally convinced himself that the elephant might really be a charm, and he took it with him the next day when he flew to Kunming as co-pilot to Captain Bill Dean. We even gave the little toy a name—"Tarfu"—which won't bear explanation, but means much the same thing as the G.I. "Snafu," only with more emphasis. Jimmy and Dean were still at Kunming the following day when Captain Bob Raines and I came in after my first familiarity flight across the Hump. Raines showed me

around the Kunming field, pointing out the C.N.A.C. operations shack at one end of the field and the 14th Air Force and Chinese Air Corps buildings and planes on the same side. There was only one runway, a wide gravel strip about two thousand yards long running southwest toward the lake. It was on the shores of this lake that the city of Kunming had been built. Rising steeply on either side and at the northeast end of the field were hills, rough and jagged, with a scrub pine growth clinging to their rocky slopes.

In the pilots' quarters we found Jimmy and Dean, and for half an hour or so after Raines had checked in with Potty Pottschmidt, the flight superintendent, and introduced me to him, we sat around talking and drinking cokes. Rather, I should say, Dean and Raines sat around talking; Jimmy and I listened. Dean's plane had taken a minor beating from a Jap Zero on the way over the day before and repairs had just been completed. Dean and Jimmy were waiting for the Chinese coolies to finish loading it with tin ingots for the return trip. When Raines heard their story about the Jap attack he and Dean began to reminisce about air battles they had been in when they were both with the Flying Tigers. The stories they told were too interesting to interrupt, so Jimmy Brown and I sat quietly by and listened. Raines had just started to extol the personal courage and brilliant leadership of the Flying Tigers' idol, General Claire Chennault, when Pottschmidt got a call from the air-raid signal tower.

"Okay, boys, get 'em off the ground. Three bombers

heading this way." Potty didn't even get up out of his desk chair. It was old stuff to him, and there was only one thing to do when a raid was coming. Get the planes into the air where they wouldn't get hurt.

The four of us were out of the shack almost before Potty finished talking. Our plane had started throwing oil just before we landed and we had sent it to the mechanics for repairs. It was still there, so Bob and I headed that way.

The plane Dean and Jimmy were flying was on the runway. As we appeared, the loading crew was closing the hatches; the plane was all ready to take off.

Dean turned, beat it back to Potty's office, and checked out. "I might as well keep on going as long as I have to take her up anyway," he said.

"They report bad ice starting north of Lake Tali," Potty told him. "And the Zeros are still working near Laokai. You don't have a hell of a lot of choice."

"I'll try the north route and risk the ice," Dean said. He ran out to his plane, and he and Jimmy took off.

Our plane wasn't ready when we reached the spot, and the "raid" was all over by the time it was finally wheeled out on the runway. The three Jap bombers had come over just as we were told they would. They dropped their bombs, but their aim was bad. The load hit half a mile or so up in the mountains that rose around the field like the rim of a cup.

When Raines and I got back to the office Raines asked

Potty which route Dean had said he and Jimmy would take.

"Said he'd try the north one and risk the ice," Potty said.

"Well, if he starts on that route he'd damn well better not change his mind after he gets out a ways," Raines said.

Just then I happened to glance at the bench where Jimmy had been sitting when Potty got his raid signal. Standing there looking very forlorn, with his big ears sticking out and his trunk hanging down almost to the cushions, was the little blue elephant.

"Damn!" I said. "Jimmy shouldn't have forgotten old Tarfu. That little fella is good luck."

Raines looked worried, but Potty just laughed. "Maybe old Tarfu is lookin' out for himself instead of his boss," he said.

Bob Robertson, a C.N.A.C. pilot who hailed from Macon, Georgia, landed at the field a couple of hours later with a cargo of Chinese and American Army officers. The Army wasn't flying that day—the weather was too bad—so the officers had to use C.N.A.C.

"Had a little chat with Dean about an hour ago," Bob told us. "He was up pretty far north and taking on a big load of ice. He wanted to know how things were down my way—I came through south of Tali. I think he probably moved down in that direction. He was kind of worried."

That was the last we ever heard of Jimmy Brown and Dean.

The best guess was that he had headed south after talking to Robertson and probably took on a double load of ice. If he had kept flying west he might have run out of the ice area before losing too much altitude. By turning south—if that's what he did—he would have stayed in the ice belt for an extra hundred miles or so.

I carried little old Tarfu with me every time I flew after that. I thought it might bring me luck in finding Jimmy and his plane. But the weather was so bad we never got a glimpse of the ground on either the northern or southern route for almost two weeks, and by then the plane and the men in it must have been deep under the mountain snow. The search, carried on for many weeks on every occasion when we could see the ground, never revealed anything of the plane or its occupants.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Pioneering the Himalaya Hump Route

THE USUAL PROCEDURE in the C.N.A.C. was to send new men out on the regular trans-Himalayan flights as soon as possible after they arrived. Gingiss, Skippy Lane and I, for instance, made our first trips over the Hump within three days after reporting for duty. We were given our own maps, including "strip" sections about a foot wide and three feet long covering only the terrain over which we would fly in crossing the Hump. The maps and strips included much territory that had never been charted or surveyed, so on each of those early flights we would mark them as we went along, noting valleys and river bends and mountain peaks—giving them names when they had none, or adopting new ones when the formal ones were too hard to remember or pronounce. Thus the Nam Kiu River, running a twisted course down

from lower Tibet to where it joined the Nmai River in Upper Burma, became the Red River, because it had a reddish color when seen from the air. The Nmai looked silvery-white, so it was the White River. The Salween, third in line as we flew east from Dinjan, patriotically assumed a bluish hue and became the Blue River; and the Lantsang Kiang, largest of them all and muddy as the Ganges, we called the Brown River.

There was little regularity as to how long a pilot had to fly the route before being checked out as a qualified C.N.A.C. flight captain. Some of the boys spent two or three months as co-pilots, others only two or three weeks. Even among the pilots who came to C.N.A.C. from the Flying Tigers after the American Volunteer Group was disbanded, there were several who spent a long time proving their ability to take a ship across the Himalayas entirely on their own. There were good reasons for this, because the Tigers were combat pilots; they were used to light, fast, single-motor planes; their previous training had taught them how to attack, to fight, to strafe—to be always on the offensive. And now they were jockeying flying freight cars; slow, cumbersome DC-3's and C-47's; and their instructions were to run for cover whenever they saw a Zero. That was hard to take for some of those lads, but those who didn't catch on pretty fast were never heard from again.

There were a number of factors that contributed to my passing the final flight check after seven trips "over the Hump." In the first place, I had my instrument rating and

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was not only able to fly blind but liked doing it; secondly, I had a thorough background in navigation; and thirdly, my year in England with the A.T.A. had taught me how to fly in almost any kind of weather, to be always on the watch for enemy planes, and always to think first of my crew and passengers, then of the plane, and only after that of heroics. On that seventh day I went up with Captain Woods, the chief pilot at Dinjan, and he put me through all my paces. Flying at a thousand feet we headed due east (90 degrees) for ten minutes; then east-southeast (110 degrees) for seven minutes; and due south (180 degrees) for three minutes. Then Woods said, "Head me into the station." Looking only at my instruments, seeing nothing of the ground below, I had to figure how far we had traveled, exactly how long it would take to return to the field, and at what angle I would approach it. We headed back, and halfway there Woods said, "Turn to the right ninety degrees." A moment later he said, "Turn to the left seventy-five degrees." Then, "Take a check on where you are." I told him where we were, and he said, "All right, head me into the station." We came in entirely on instruments and touched the runway exactly as planned. Woods shook my hand before he climbed out of the plane.

That made me feel good, passing the tests so promptly, but it made me feel even better the next day when I was ten minutes out of the base carrying my first cargo as a full-fledged C.N.A.C. flight captain to read the message handed to me by my radio operator, Eddie Quinn. It had

luxury which we later found was about as rare in Calcutta as a snowdrift.

"With this little prize, boys," Tony said, "you can make a hit with any girl in all of India. It's yours for one hundred bucks."

Gingiss and I stared at the man. Then Gingiss turned to me. "He's crazy," Al said.

"Crazy as a loon," I agreed.

"Crazy like a fox," Tony said, laughing boisterously.

His laugh attracted the startled attention of the tall and dignified Englishman standing next to him. And then, as Tony much less furtively started to put the perfume back in his pocket, the Britisher touched him on the arm. "I beg your pardon," the fellow said, "but is that a bottle of Chanel Number 5 that I—ahh—saw in your hand?" The man's face was flushed, but his eagerness overrode his embarrassment. "Rude of me, I know," he said, "but—well, after all, sir—Chanel Number 5!"

Tony winked at Gingiss and me as he gave his attention to the Englishman. "It cost me a fortune. I don't know why I ever bought it. But that's what it is—Chanel Number 5. Maybe you know someone who'd like to take it off my hands—for a hundred and fifty dollars."

The Englishman looked around nervously as if to ward off any further bids as he dug into his pocket. Then quickly he turned over the money, pocketed the perfume, and after gulping down his Scotch and soda dashed out of the bar.

"Amazing!" Gingiss exclaimed, staring at Tony. "But where was the poor sucker rushing to like that?"

"I wouldn't know," the Great White Trader replied. "Maybe out to Karaya Road to build himself in solid with Margot."

"This gets more interesting all the time," Gingiss said. "Who is Margot?"

Tony's thick black eyebrows drew together in a scowl made really fierce by a thick growth of beard. He started to answer, then stopped. He turned to the bar and pounded the mahogany so that glasses jumped up and down its entire length. The bartender came running. "Yes, yes, sahib!"

"Who is Margot?" Tony thundered. "Tell these boys about Margot!"

The Indian grinned and lifted his hands helplessly. "Me, sahib—I only have heard. You, sahib—you know!"

Everybody in the room laughed and for a moment the Great White Trader lost some of his poise. He made a quick recovery, however, by buying a round of drinks. And he never did tell us much about Margot. He told instead about several other famous ladies of Calcutta, dwelling at length upon Tangerine and Bitty, of Six Acre Road, whom he seemed to favor. Before we left the 300 Club that day Gingiss and I felt that we had learned quite a bit about India, the land of mystery and highly commercialized romance.

Tony Mercede has been one of my best friends from the first day we met. He is back in the States now, a traf-

fic expert with a nationwide trucking concern, but how he can reconcile himself to such an uneventful life as that after what he went through in China and India for two years is a mystery to me. He started in the trucking business as a greaser and mechanic when he was sixteen, coming up the hard way to the point where, in 1941, he was loaned to the United States Government by his employer. The Government, having received the Arnstein report on the inefficient use and handling of Lend Lease trucking equipment on the Burma Road, immediately sent Tony to China as a transportation adviser to the Chinese Government.

Tony was well on his way when the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor; he cleared Manila twelve hours before the city fell. He was a transportation engineer on the Burma Road when the Japs invaded Burma in the spring of 1942, and he was working with the Chinese troops, dynamiting bridges and fighting off guerrilla attacks, throughout the long campaign which finally left the road a useless ribbon of bomb craters and rubble as far north as Lashio on the Chinese border. After that he still worked to keep the road clear and traffic moving between Lashio and Kunming and on up to Chungking, and for many months before he returned to the States with Gingiss and me in the summer of 1943 he was in charge of a construction gang on the new Ledo Road—more commonly called the “Road to Tokio”—which connects with the China branch of the Burma Road to provide a land route from Assam to Kunming.

Tony wasn't the only trinket trader among the American lads in China and India, but he was by far the most famous of them. Most of the trading among our officers and engineers and ground crews and pilots was done haphazardly. A fellow newly arrived would have an extra cigarette lighter in his baggage, and he would soon find a purchaser willing to pay ten times its original cost because cigarette lighters are unobtainable. Another would have some fancy lipstick, or a bottle of perfume, or a pair of nylon stockings. Such stuff would be brought along for very obvious reasons, and when the boys discovered that the available girls weren't worth seducing—or too unhealthy to make it worth the risk—they would try to sell their little prizes.

At that point, Tony would usually be on hand. And because his job took him all around the country—from Chungking in the north all the way to Calcutta in the south—he could usually find a market for anything he picked up. He would take along a bag full of feminine trinkets when he went to Calcutta and sell them—as he did the Chanel Number 5—to some anxious swain in the city of high-priced romance. Then he would shop around among the native stores and shops, picking up some liquor or tobacco or knives to take back with him. In between buying and selling, Tony became famous as a trinket trader, but invariably he would lend “a friend” money, and never see or hear of him again.

He was a gambler of great ability and infinite nerve. He got into a ten-day poker game at Kunming on one

occasion with a bunch of Flying Tigers and was over five thousand dollars in the hole when his luck changed on the last day. He lost sixteen pounds during that session, but when the game was over and the chips were counted Tony was twelve thousand dollars ahead.

The next time we saw Tony, after that first meeting with him at the 300 Club in Calcutta, was at the Christmas party given for all the American Army and civilian pilots in China by General and Madame Chiang Kai-shek. Tony wasn't a pilot, but he was working in close collaboration at that time with Major Duke Doring, U. S. Ferry Command control officer at Kunming, and thus was given an invitation.

The party was held at Hostel Number One, our usual living quarters when we were at Kunming, and formerly a Chinese college. The buildings and grounds had been turned over to the "Flying Tigers" by the Generalissimo when Colonel Chennault organized the American Volunteer Group in 1940. When the United States formally entered the war on December 8, 1941, the Air Force promptly set up its own Fighter Command station at Kunming, with Chennault, commissioned a brigadier general then, in full charge; and he retained the use of the Hostel. Many of his Flying Tigers, incidentally, were given commissions in the Air Force and thus enabled to remain with their famous leader. Others, because they lacked the necessary educational background, or for some other such technical reason—in disregard of their brilliant combat performance with the AVG—were not ac-

cepted by the Army. Many of these, like Dean and "Duke" Headman, stayed on to fly with C.N.A.C. rather than return home to be drafted into some non-flying branch of the service.

Madame Chiang Kai-shek was our hostess *in absentia*, being at that time (December, 1942) on her famous tour of the United States. She sent a cable to her guests, however, which was read to us by one of the Generalissimo's aides. It was a very touching message, quite sincere in its words of praise and admiration for the American airmen working side by side with her own people.

The party lasted from early evening until midnight. The table was set with the finest array of food I had seen since leaving the States—great quantities of Chinese dishes, along with roasts of beef and lamb and a variety of vegetables prepared in American style. There was Bourbon and Scotch, and wines to suit a score of tastes. Each of the guests was presented with a maroon silk necktie bearing the coat of arms, or "chop," of the Generalissimo's family; also an elaborate and very beautiful Christmas card.

The Great White Trader was talking with a group of Ferry Command pilots in one corner of the banquet hall when Gingiss and I spotted him. The rest of the boys from Dinjan who were with us hadn't met Tony, so we pushed into the group and made the introductions.

Skippy Lane, of course, was introduced. Then Bill Fox, a tall, handsome, black-haired boy from Dalhart, Texas; Glenn Cunningham, a lad from Boston; Bud Snell and

Dick Newmeyer, both of California; and Duke Headman, the ex-Tiger, with several Jap ships to his credit. We shook hands all around with the Ferry pilots, then everybody settled down to absorbing the Generalissimo's Scotch and Bourbon, while Tony went on with the story we had interrupted.

"I was just telling the boys how I almost didn't get here," he explained. "I was working with a construction crew on the Ledo Road just a few miles east of Ledo last night, and about eleven o'clock this Jap bomber came over.

"You couldn't see a hundred feet ahead of you, the fog was so thick, but this baby had his direction perfect. He came over once on a practice pass and we heard the rumble of his off motor. That's the only way we knew it was a Jap, of course, because you couldn't see the son of a b——. But that uneven motor was a give-away. Well, he passed over once, and we all dove into the ditches—all of us, a hundred men in the construction gang, and thirty soldiers with about a dozen Chinese officers. We lay there in the mud and waited for the bombs, and I'm telling you if he dropped 'em they'd have hit right in the middle of the road, he was that low and smack over the target. But he didn't drop 'em.

"As soon as he was gone we got up and wiped the mud out of our eyes, and started to work. And then we heard the son of a b—— coming back. In we went again, and by God he came over at the same level and in the same place—but he still didn't drop any bombs.

"That happened three times and then the plane went away and we didn't hear it any more. The only way I can figure it is he decided he'd missed the target. Those three passes, you know—he must have been damned uncertain or he'd never done that. He couldn't have known we didn't have an ack gun—and brother, if we'd had one we'd sure have shot hell out of him. He wasn't more than five hundred feet above us—and right straight above, you could tell every time."

Gingiss was especially attentive during Tony's recital. When it was finished, Al said, "That was about eleven o'clock, did you say?"

"Yeah, I looked at my watch. The first pass was at five to eleven. The last one must have been about ten after."

"Um-hmm," Gingiss said thoughtfully. "Do you usually have ack guns when you're working down that way?"

"Hell, yes," Tony said. "And my boys know how to use 'em!"

"I must remember that," Gingiss said. "I lost my bearings coming over last night. One motor wasn't working just right, and trying to goose it up a little I got off the course. Then I found a little break in the fog and flew over it three times before I finally identified it as a lake in the Naga Hills just east of Ledo . . ."

Tony glared at Gingiss for a full minute, utterly speechless for probably the first time in his voluble life. Then he got himself under control, gulped down a huge drink of Scotch, and said, "Okay, okay. I won't murder you

now. But remember about those ack guns. Next time I'm going to fire them myself—and I'll be hopin' it's you in the planel!"

I retired earlier than most of the boys that night, remembering that the next day—Christmas or not—we would have to be at the field and ready for work at six o'clock, but it wasn't long before I regretted my haste.

Someone in the party got the inspiration, along about midnight, to sing Christmas carols, and the entire crowd—over a hundred men—joined in. The singing wasn't the least bit drunken, although the party had been getting pleasantly ribald for an hour or so before I turned in; it was simply loud, lusty, sentimental and inspired. It was beautiful, and I wished I were out of bed and singing with them.

A group of Army nurses in one of the smaller buildings across the wide green lawn of the campus finally gathered on their front porch and joined in the songs. The pilots heard them and, still singing, drifted out of the Hostel and filed down the hedge-bordered gravel walk toward the nurses' cottage. I got out of bed and watched from my second-floor window as the two groups met there in the moonlight and, as casually as if they were back home in Cactus Center or Kokomo, linked arms in pairs and threes and fours and continued their solemn and beautiful serenade to the Christ Child and the Three Wise Men and The Little Star of Bethlehem.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

One Thing After the Other

IT ALWAYS SEEMED STRANGE to me that the Army, with its super-high standards for the Air Corps and the rigorous training it puts its pilots through, should at the same time leave so little responsibility to the pilots in the matter of when they should fly and when they shouldn't. We boys in the C.N.A.C. carried supplies and personnel across the Himalayas for China whenever they were ready to be flown; and that meant that scarcely a day passed when at least one or two of our planes weren't in the air.

We flew thousands of tons of material across those mountains during ten-day and sometimes even two-week periods when not a single Army plane was allowed to get off the ground.

If that seems to reflect more courage and daring

on the part of C.N.A.C. civilian pilots than upon Air Force personnel, it should not. The Army pilots themselves would have flown in any kind of weather, and as the Army Ferry Command developed alongside the C.N.A.C. on the route between Kunming and Dinjan, the red tape began to thin out a little and the pilots were given more leeway. But for many months during the time I worked for C.N.A.C. our boys would be flying regular schedules across the mountains while Army regulations were keeping scores of planes—loaded and ready—standing on the fog-shrouded fields.

Tony Mercedes took up a spirited defense of the Army every time Gingiss or I, or others in the C.N.A.C., started to criticize it for its panty-waist flying regulations. At that time, of course, toward the end of '42 and early '43, Tony was attached to the Army base at Kunming. But it wasn't just his affiliation that backed up his defense; he honestly believed the Army was doing what it should do.

"Listen, jerks," he said one day. "You guys are getting paid big dough for doing your job; these kids in the Army are getting regular Army flier's pay. You can quit your jobs, these kids can't. The Army has a lot more authority over its boys than C.N.A.C. has over you—but it has a bigger obligation, too. C.N.A.C. has a big job to do and it has to do it fast—or it'll be all washed up. The Army has a big job to do, but it has all the time in the world to do it in—and the more time it takes the more boys it's going to bring back alive."

To some extent Tony was right; but he was all wrong

on that matter of the money we were making. He was not the first and by no means the last to accuse C.N.A.C. pilots and even the men in the A.T.A. in England of being mercenaries, but neither he nor others of his viewpoint considered our side of it. Virtually all of us "mercenaries" had paid for our flying education out of our own pockets—and almost 100 per cent of the Army pilots had been given their training at Government expense. We had investments in our flying ability; they did not. But I didn't want to go into all that again. Instead I said: "Wait a minute, Tony. Do you remember back in 1933 when the Army took over the airmail routes in the States? Remember how many planes and pilots were lost in that little misadventure? And do you know why? It was because the Army didn't know a third as much about blind flying as the commercial pilots did. . . . And it's the same thing over here right now. There are a lot of stuffed shirts in the Army—even in the Air Force—and they're so cocky about their rank and their military dignity that they think they know everything worth knowing about flying. Anyone not in Army uniform or of a lower rank than their own is ignorant. That's the way they figure, and here's one little instance to prove it . . ."

And then I told Tony and Gingiss and Skippy and a couple of the other boys gathered around about a little incident I had played a part in a short time before.

When I left Dinjan one morning with a planeload of Chinese money—baled in big tin containers and amounting to over a million dollars Chinese—there were eight

American and British Army officers at the field. Four of them had names that regularly made the headlines in American newspapers; the other four were top-ranking colonels and brigadier generals. They had come in from Calcutta in a big Flying Fortress piloted by an extremely self-satisfied and cocky little colonel.

C.N.A.C.'s field office was alongside the west runway at Dinjan, and while I was waiting for one of our usual weather reports ("Ceiling unknown; visibility limited") I saw the Little Colonel standing out in front of his B-17 with a map in his hands.

"Morning, Colonel," I said. "Where you bound—over the Hump or back west?"

"Eh?" the fellow said, looking up rather foggily. "Why, ah—we're going on to Kunming. The ship's being refueled."

"It's been pretty rough on the north route the last few days," I offered. "The ice is bad. South route's not bad for weather, but the Zeros have been thick as flies the last week."

The Little Colonel looked at me as if to say he hadn't asked for a speech, so I started to move away. But then I remembered those bigwigs I had seen come in with him on the B-17, and I thought, What the hell, those lads shouldn't pay with their lives for this little squirt's conceit. So I went back to him and said, "I'm going over myself in a few minutes. I'll wait if you like and lead the way. I know the routes pretty well."

The Little Colonel's eyebrows popped up until they

almost disappeared under his cap. If I had been a junior officer in the Army I think he would have organized a court martial right on the spot. He waited until his blood pressure subsided a little, then smiled indulgently and said, "Thank you, son, but I daresay I'll get along all right." Then he turned and strode off.

My plane was ready a little while later, and I lit out for Kunming with a million-dollar payroll for the Chinese Army. The Little Colonel was still puzzling over his map as my C-53 thundered down the runway. He was too pre-occupied to notice that I had cocked a snook in his direction, but the salute delighted my Chinese co-pilot, Eddie Quinn.

The weather was not half as bad as it had promised to be, and I decided that after all it wasn't going to be too tough on the Little Colonel. But I judged the man too charitably; it was plenty tough on him. Apparently the reason he was puzzling over that map for so long was that he couldn't understand it. Or if he could, then he was unable to read it and fly the plane at the same time. In any event he was lost over the Himalayas for four hours on the crossing—almost certainly knowing nothing whatever about the hundreds of towering peaks poking up into the clouds to smash himself and his load of Allied leaders to bits—and when he brought the B-17 into Kunming that afternoon, just as I was about to start back with another cargo, he showed the first sign of skill and flying sense that he had shown all day. The plane was on its last few drops of gas. The outer starboard engine was

dead and the other on the same side was coughing as he came in over the rim of hills surrounding the field; but in spite of that he brought his ship down with no more than a violent jolt and a near ground loop.

"What did you say to him, Gen?" Tony wanted to know.

"I didn't say anything," I replied. "I just stood on the runway and watched him as he climbed out of the plane."

"You weren't even laughing, I suppose," Tony said.

"Well—maybe I was, a little bit anyway," I admitted. "But the guy was a good sport, at that. He saw me standing there and he started to turn away, as though he didn't recognize me. But then he spun around, squared his shoulders and saluted, and I popped a salute right back. One of his brass-hat passengers saw the performance and gave the Little Colonel a questioning glance, but I have a hunch he didn't get the right answer."

As a general rule we in the C.N.A.C. flew singly, although occasionally two or three planes would be loaded and ready at the same time and if the pilots decided to fly the same route they might take off together and fly formation all the way over. The safer and more common procedure, however, was for planes leaving at the same time to fly half a mile or a mile apart so as to offer a less attractive target to Jap fighter planes in case they were patrolling the route.

Our radios, when they were working, made interplane conversation possible during the entire four- or five-hour run, in contrast to when we flew singly and could only

send or receive code signals after we were half an hour out of the base. And while chatting back and forth with the other planes was likely to betray our position to Japs in the vicinity, we still did it now and then when necessary . . .

Gingiss and I were about three hundred miles out of Dinjan one day in February, enjoying the first clear weather we had had in several weeks. At fifteen thousand feet we were well above the overcast and the sun was bright on the wings of the planes. Below was an endless sea of white cloud, broken only here and there by convectional currents moving up over the mountains below. Passing above a hole in the clouds like that we could look down and get a brief glimpse of the snow-capped peak shining bluish-white in the sun.

When we were in Calcutta a short time before, the dance bands and music boxes were in the grip of Bing Crosby's latest hit, "White Christmas," and seeing the snow on one of those mountain peaks brought the song to mind. I put my microphone against my throat and began to sing. Gingiss knew the words and he too joined in. The result was not beautiful, but it sounded so to us. Even Tsui, my sober-faced little Chinese radioman, and my solemn co-pilot, Eddie Quinn, were tapping their feet to the rhythm as Al and I went into a specially catchy "bubububub" passage. Suddenly Gingiss broke in with, "We're attracting an audience, Gen. Six P-40's are falling in right behind us."

I dropped the mike and made a quick shift to the left

ONE THING AFTER THE OTHER

to get a squint at our guests. Singing on the interplane sets was discouraged by the authorities, and I didn't know but what there might be plenty of authority riding in those P-40's. But what I saw was far worse than any C.N.A.C. or Army big shot.

"P-40's my eye!" I yelled at Gingiss, grabbing the mike again. "Those are Zeros!"

My slipping out to the left to get a look at them had given them their cue, and they were already falling out one by one for the kill. Even as I slid my big transport into a dive for the nearest cloud formation I could see three of the Japs heading for me and the other three for Gingiss.

"Hold onto your hats, boys! Here we go again!" I yelled to Eddie and Tsui, and the three of us instinctively ducked as we waited for the rattle of machine-gun bullets against the tail of the plane. Fortunately, we didn't have more than about one thousand feet to dive before we were in the clouds, and although one of the Zeros was within a hundred yards of us when we went into the enveloping mist none of his bullets touched the plane. Once in there, of course, we were virtually impossible to find, and that was the last we saw of the Nips. After about five minutes Gingiss came in on the mike. "How you doin', Bing?"

"All right," I said, "but I think I'll stay in here for a while."

"Me too," Gingiss replied. "One of the bastards put a row of polka dots in my right wing."

There was a lot of Jap activity over the route that day. Bill Fox came into Kunming an hour or so after Gingiss and I, having flown on one motor all the way from Lake Tali. A Jap had come up from underneath him and shot out his port engine before he had a chance to do anything, but on the one good engine he had run for a cloud and hidden in it, as Gingiss and I did, until the Jap couldn't wait any longer and went away.

Tony Mercede was at Kunming that day—April 21, as I recall—and he and Gingiss and Fox and I were sitting in the C.N.A.C. pilots' lounge when the air-raid signal sounded. "Potty" Pottschmidt was at his desk in the adjoining office, but he kept right on working for a couple of minutes. Then he got up and came out into the lounge, lighting a cigarette.

"They must have heard Chennault's away," he remarked.

I had heard previously that General Chennault had left Kunming on some important military mission and was not expected back for a week or so, but I didn't attach any significance to Potty's remark until later when I learned that the General had an almost foolproof system figured out for anticipating and gauging the strength of Jap attacks on the Kunming area long before the attacks took place. It involved an elaborate chart showing a score or so of possible Jap plots or strategies. All the information that came in regarding Jap air activity in various parts of the country was noted on the chart, providing a flexible index to the number of enemy planes to the north,

south, east and west of Kunming. The chart was not really foolproof, of course, but coupled with Chennault's super ability as a strategist and a tactician, it worked like a charm for him.

But this day he was away. Taking his place at the 14th Air Force headquarters was a brigadier general newly arrived from the States.

Chennault's alarm system had probably been explained to the new general before he was left even in momentary charge, but in the excitement of having to apply his sketchy knowledge he developed a bad case of jitters, and the planes were almost over the field before he gave any orders. Then it wasn't because he had figured out the chart or knew the least thing about the direction and strength of the attack; he simply remembered that nearly the entire gasoline supply for the 14th Air Force was concentrated there at Kunming airdrome.

The general raced out onto the field. We watched him in amazement from the C.N.A.C. lounge. The mechanics had pushed our planes as far out of harm's way as possible; there was nothing else we could do. The Army handled the antiaircraft batteries, and their planes were already camouflaged or hidden under trees surrounding the field. The general probably had something in mind when he started running, but he forgot it halfway across the field as the Jap bombers came in over the rim of the hills to the north. So there he stood, waving his arms and shouting orders, but nobody was near enough to hear him. Everybody else had sense enough to take cover.

The bombs rained down. The gasoline dump blew up with a roar and a sheet of flame; four bombs hit the landing strip, and half a dozen planes were wrecked or damaged. When the smoke and dust settled down we saw the general staggering back from the center of the field with his hands clutched in agony to the seat of his pants. A first-aid gang rushed out to meet him, and he was the first man I ever saw brought in on a stretcher face down. It took the surgeon at the base hospital half an hour to pick the shrapnel out of his fanny.

For the next two weeks the C.N.A.C. flew nothing into Kunming but aviation gasoline, and there's nothing in the world more dangerous than that to transport by air across the Himalaya Hump. A C-53 can take a lot of machine-gunning from a Jap Zero when it's loaded with tin ingots or tungsten or mercury and antimony bars, or even passengers, but when it's loaded with high-octane gasoline one bullet in almost any part of the fuselage can set the whole ship aflame.

Not only are the Zeros a threat at a time like that; the weather itself can be your undoing. On two of my trips across that week I had to climb so high to find ice-free air that the fuel drums I was carrying burst at the seams from the lowered air pressure. On one of those trips—the first one—I was rather enjoying the weird phenomenon of St. Elmo's Fire as the blue flame swept back and forth through the rain on the leading edges of my wings and spread like a thin sheet over the windshields. Two or three times I had put a finger within an

inch or so of the air-speed indicator and watched the arc of blue flame bridge the gap between my finger and the instrument. Then, with a report like a smothered bomb, I heard the first drum burst in the rear of the plane.

I couldn't see the tail surfaces of the planes, but I knew that St. Elmo would be dancing his blue fantasy on their leading edge, too. And I wondered how long it would take for the gasoline to seep through some tiny crevice in the body of the plane and stretch an incendiary ribbon back along the fuselage to that flame. I could smell the fumes of the gasoline the instant I loosened my oxygen mask. They increased in intensity as one drum after another gave way with that ominous thud. St. Elmo's Fire wasn't the only hazard; I knew we would be out of the climatic condition that caused it within a matter of minutes. But the occasional sparks and constant seering blast from the exhaust pipes on either motor were hazards that would ride with us all the way to Kunming.

At times like that more than any other—at least in my experience—a man can get awfully close to his religion and his God. I don't envy the lad at all who doesn't have something like that to go back to. It wouldn't matter how good a pilot you were or how carefully you handled your plane at a time like that, you still couldn't do anything to keep a tiny spark from touching a tiny, leaking drop of gasoline; and that's all it would take to blow you to Kingdom Come. You were absolutely helpless. All I could ever do at such times was pray. I prob-

ably said on an average three Acts of Contrition every time I flew across the Hump. Sometimes they were forgotten entirely after the first one before the take-off (that was a must since the day before I left for England when I visited Mother Superior, the nun who had taught me in parochial school); but there were other times, when my plane was loaded with bursting gas drums and my mind was on St. Elmo and the exhaust pipes, that I was rattling off one good Act a minute for half an hour at a stretch.

Whenever we flew gasoline we preferred to do it during the daytime, although with other types of cargo it was sometimes safer, because of either weather or Jap activity, to make the trip at night. With gasoline, however, there were plenty of hazards without adding to them the certainty of having to make an instrument approach to the field.

The fields at both Dinjan and Kunming had no floodlights to assist in a night landing or take-off. The black-outs at both fields were complete except for dim rows of green and red lights that would be flashed on for an instant along the landing strips just before a plane's wheels touched the ground.

The reason for such precaution, of course, was to protect the fields from sneak attacks by Jap planes—and there were many such. Few of them, however, were very successful. There were two techniques most commonly used by the Japs, both of which depended for their

effectiveness on the well-known fact that C.N.A.C. planes had frequent radio trouble and were at such times unable to contact the field prior to coming in for a landing. Also, because of the generally bad flying conditions, our planes often came into Kunming or Dinjan with one or both motors in faulty working condition. If both motors were in good shape the pilot could keep them perfectly synchronized, then the sound detectors at the base, which get an effective bearing on a multi-motored ship only if the engines are in synchronization, could exactly determine the plane's position.

A Japanese bomber, therefore, would come in high, above the clouds, with his motors out of synchronization. The ground crew at the base wouldn't know where the plane was because the detector couldn't get a bearing, and there would be no way of knowing until the plane came out of the clouds whether it was a friendly plane having both radio and motor trouble, or whether it was a Jap. If it were the latter, and his instrument approach was on the nose, the bombs would be dropping almost as soon as the plane appeared from out of the clouds. Fortunately, most of their instrument work was pretty sloppy and they would be under an antiaircraft barrage with Army fighters swarming up to meet them before they were anywhere near the field.

At night the Japs had a special advantage. Keeping the motors in synchronization sometimes, and sometimes not, the bomber would come in toward the field with its landing lights on, just as if it were a C.N.A.C.

plane whose radio wasn't working. The A.A. guns wouldn't fire until the ship was identified, and by then, occasionally, it would be too late and the bombs would be falling. The searchlights on the ground were our best protection in cases like that, because as soon as they found the plane the gunners could see if the landing gear was up or down. If it was up, they would fire—and the Japs never dared to put their gear down to improve the deception for fear of losing too much speed. They always needed all they had to get away after the job was done.

After delivering a load of gas to Kunming one day, I started on the return trip to Dinjan about six o'clock in the evening, figuring to get in a little before midnight and have a good night's sleep before heading back the next morning with another load. The return trip was rough. We found soft ice on the south route, and, heading up north hoping to get away from it, ran into clear ice—the kind that sticks in big chunks on the wings and props instead of conforming to the plane's surface. It was difficult to keep our altitude. The ice gathered on the propeller blades and distorted the rhythm of the motors. Suddenly there would be a terrific crash as the blade threw the ice free and smashed it against the body of the plane or the wing. If the radio had been working I would have checked with the field about conditions farther south, but it had gone dead half an hour after the take-off.

The strain on the engines was terrific. It was impossible to keep them coordinated. A good hour before we

got back to Dinjan the one on the left was beginning to foul. It would run all right for a few minutes, then start to cough and sputter. By working on the carburetor control I would get it back into adjustment. Then it would go bad again.

My approach to the field at Dinjan was good on the first try, but just as I was letting down the landing gear that left engine started to kick up again. I grabbed the carburetor control and started working on it, and then I heard Eddie Quinn, my co-pilot, let out a yell. A second later there was a terrific explosion. I realized we were being fired on by our own antiaircraft batteries. I slammed the throttle forward and got the hell up out of there as fast as I could, and I cursed that dead radio with every word in the books, even blistering Tsui a few times for not being able to fix it. For half an hour we flew around in wide circles—well out of the guns' range—working on that motor, and when it finally seemed to be in fairly good shape we tried the landing again, frantically flashing our landing lights, dropping our gear, slowing our engine speed—doing everything but dropping notes out of the plane that we were good guys, friends, and wanted nothing but a quiet landing and a good night's sleep. We were so earnest about it that the overzealous A.A. boys finally were convinced and we came down without further trouble.

Engine trouble dogged me those last few days in February. The C-53 I had recently been assigned had

developed a habit of coughing and sputtering for a couple of minutes every time I got about a thousand feet off the ground on the take-off from Dinjan. It was obviously carburetor trouble, and I would jiggle the instruments, changing the mixture and pushing up the throttle or pulling it back, fiddling around generally in hope of fixing it. And I always did fix it, in spite of the fact that I never knew what particular thing I did that was effective. I reported the trouble to the mechanics at Kunming when we landed and told them to clean the carburetors. When we took off everything was perfect. But the next trip out of Dinjan I had the same trouble.

One day, as I ran the big ship down the runway, I noticed the terrific cloud of dust that fanned out behind us to fall like a soft brown blanket over the field. That was the answer, I was sure; that dust was getting into the carburetors somehow, and I circled around the field until the coughing started, ran its course, cleared up again, and then I brought the ship down.

"Take those carburetors apart and clean them again," I told my mechanic. "Then fix the air filters. There's a leak somewhere, and the dust from the field is getting into the lines."

He did what I told him, and when we took off again the motors worked perfectly. I felt a glow of satisfaction at having licked the problem. I was beginning to like the ship in spite of all the trouble it had caused me when, late that afternoon, about seventy-five miles out of Kunming, the oil pump shaft on the starboard engine broke. I

switched off that engine, feathered the prop and brought the ship into Kunming on the good one. After reporting the trouble, I went up to Stamp Smith's to spend the night.

Stamp Smith is a little Englishman who has lived in China for over forty years, most of the time right around Kunming. I don't know what his real Christian name is, he is never called anything but "Stamp" by the Chinese and whites alike. It's appropriate enough, surely, because he has been the postmaster there for many years. Both Smith and his ancient Chinese servant, Samshu, had been trying to do their part ever since American boys began flying out of Kunming in the service of China, and the big house where they lived a short distance from the field was open to us at all times. Of course we always gave Samshu a "gift" of money whenever we accepted Smith's hospitality, but despite that, the atmosphere of the place was like a home, not at all like a hotel.

When I returned to the field the next morning the Chinese mechanic who had been working on my plane told me that the oil pump was all right; the trouble had been caused by a leaky valve cover. That was a little hard for me to believe, but I told him to warm up the engines and we would soon see if the pump was okay. The instruments indicated that it was.

An hour later when the ship was loaded and warmed up, my new co-pilot, Jimmy Mar, Tsui and I took off. The fog was so thick as we went down the runway I couldn't even see the edge of the field. That in itself was nothing

unusual, but the overcast was increasingly thick as we climbed. The altimeter read 14,000 feet before we got out of the clouds, and then we ran into heavy sleet and strong head winds. We were in that for about fifteen minutes when the starboard engine shot a geyser of oil through its cowlings and blanked out.

"That dead-head son of a so and so!" I screamed. "I knew it was the pump! What the hell is the matter with those dizzy —" etcetera, etcetera. The placid Jimmy Mar, who had only flown with me three or four times, had probably never in his life heard an outburst like that. He kept staring straight ahead as if it would be indecent to look at me in my rage.

When I finally cooled off I started checking the instruments. With that overcast running all the way down to the field I was going to have to go back on one engine and make an instrument procedural letdown. Under those conditions such an operation would be bad enough on two engines. I had to estimate how far we had gone—basing the estimate on time elapsed and average flying speed. I had to chart the direction we had taken and correct that with the estimated effect of the head winds. Then I had to turn the ship around and go back to the field on almost the same course we had taken coming out. I say "almost," because on the instrument letdown I would have to come in against the wind, from the opposite end of the field from the take-off.

When Jimmy Mar saw me charting the return he looked startled.

"But, Captain," he said, "do you think we *can* make an instrument letdown?"

"We damn well better, Jimmy," I said. "We can't stay up here on one engine waiting for the weather to clear up."

We slugged along back toward Kunming while I did my figuring of air speed on one engine as against speed on two engines coming out, trying to keep our rate of descent approximate to what our climb had been, and finally, when we were fairly near the field, I called the control tower and told them that one of my engines had conked out and to clear the field, I was coming in on the other one.

"What?" the Army man in the control tower cried. "But, Captain, you haven't any visibility at all! I can't even see the end of the runway from the tower. I can't give you clearance for a landing like that!"

I laughed—not because it was the least bit funny, but because it was absurd. "Well, brother," I said, "you just damn well better give me clearance because I'm coming in anyway. I'm no Army pilot and you aren't telling me what to do."

I could picture the fellow sweating about that during the silence that followed, but finally he said, "All right, I'll help as much as I can—but one engine—on instruments—my God!"

He wasn't any more worried than I, but there was no alternative. Coming in over the field on a due south course I began to let down rapidly as we went on out

over Lake Tien Chih, whose northernmost tip touches the city of Kunming. The elevation of the lake—and of course of the city itself and of the airport—is 6400 feet, so at 7000 feet I began watching for the shoreline and some kind of landmark. We were within a hundred feet of the water before we could see anything through the overcast. A row of fishing shacks appeared then, and I knew where I was; immediately I swung the ship around, keeping the dead engine high, to the northeast end of the field. As I straightened the ship out on a course of 225 degrees, I could feel the tenseness all around me.

We were about a hundred feet off the ground and, according to my calculations, heading right into the landing strip, when the soldier in the tower in wild excitement began shouting, "You've got it! You've got it! That's it! Let her down!" I dropped the gear and we came on in. It was as smooth a landing as I have ever made.

I found the mechanic who had been so optimistic about the oil pump and I gave him hell. Jimmy Mar stood alongside me during the tirade, nodding his round little head and translating my remarks into Chinese, and the mechanic had no trouble understanding that he was a fathead and a boob. I left the plane there to be fixed and took another ship back to Dinjan.

But it wasn't the planes, I finally had to conclude, because only two days later I took off from Dinjan and ran into trouble again. Jimmy Mar was a pretty good boy, an American-born Chinese, well educated and bright as

a dollar. In the short time we had worked together I had come to like him just about as much as I had liked Eddie Quinn, the Chinese who preceded him. So when he asked me if he might try a take-off that morning, I said, "Sure, why not?"

Jimmy took the captain's seat at the controls and I dropped into the co-pilot's seat. I had him go over the instruments first, giving me their readings, then telling me how much boost he would give us on the take-off, what propeller pitch he would use, etc.—a regular instructor's check-up. When he had everything straight I told him to get cuttin'.

Our wheels were just about to get off the ground—we were eight hundred yards down the runway—when the port engine started to race like wild and the ship slewed off to the left. At the same instant the gauge indicating the propeller pitch swung around to indicate only half power, and oil began to pump out of it. I knew what had happened. The governor controlling the propeller pitch had sheared its pin. I yelled, "I've got it!" and Jimmy let go as I grabbed the controls and shoved the right engine throttle fully forward, pushing hard right rudder at the same time to correct the swing. If there had been any runway left I would have slapped on the brakes, but we were bearing down fast on the jungle out of which the field had been cut and our only chance was to try to complete the take-off on one engine.

We managed it, somehow, pulling off and up in a shallow climb with the right engine working for all it was

worth, missing the tops of the trees around the field by scant inches as we fought to keep the fully-loaded plane in the air. Once we got over that first hurdle of getting the plane up there, all we had to do was to make as short a circle to the right as we dared, and come in, still on one engine, for a landing.

When I climbed out of that baby I was shaking like a leaf. Quite an audience had gathered around to see what was going to happen after the port engine let out its wild roar before the take-off, and they were lined up on the field as we came in. When I stepped out of the plane a couple of British pilots who were visiting the Army headquarters called out "Bravo!" and Skippy Lane, who was waiting to take off himself, took a cigarette out of his mouth long enough to say, "Short trip, eh, Genovese?" But all I could think of was one thing, and as soon as I found Captain Woods, the chief pilot at Dinjan, I said it. "I've had enough, my friend. That's three close calls in less than a week. I'm takin' a vacation!"

"Woody" nodded thoughtfully, and after a moment he said, "Good idea, Gen. You've earned it. And anyway, I have six passengers for Calcutta. I'll give you a ship to fly down there and you can take these guys along with you . . ."

You earn your money with the C.N.A.C., but you've got to admit they're generous. They would give you all the snow in Tibet if they thought you would shovel it away.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BILL FOX GOES DOWN

I HAD A LOT of preconceived ideas about India that weren't at all disturbed by living there for the better part of a year. I had thought of India as hot, and it is as hot as the proverbial hinges of hell. I had thought of it as beautiful, colorful, romantic—and it is all of that, or at least parts of India are. I had pictured it as a land overgrown with jungle and overrun by monkeys and jackals and tigers and leopards, and it is all of that. I had heard of the sacred cows wandering in the streets of the cities, and of the natives by the thousands bathing in the filthy but also sacred Ganges—and the cows do wander in the streets, and the people do flounder around in the muddy water of the river.

But I had thought of Indian maharajahs as formidable people, austere and solemn, enthroned on silken cushions and lousy with jewels, surrounded by harems of gorgeous

girls. I thought of maharajahs as perhaps the most aloof and regal of all royal personages—and I had no reason to think otherwise, because that's the way they always are in books and movies; and when you walk down the streets of Calcutta or the other cities of India you just don't run into them, that's all.

But these are somber thoughts, and I wasn't thinking them at all as I stood at the bar in the 300 Club drinking a coke while Tony Mercede polished off one Scotch and soda after another. I was thinking instead about how we might spend the rest of the afternoon, pending the arrival of Gingiss and Lane in the evening.

"We might take a run out to Six Acre Road," Tony suggested. "You've never met Tangerine and Bitty."

"That's right," I said, "I never have. But I don't like to go to a place like that. Why don't we give 'em a call and have them come into town? We could take them out to dinner and have a few drinks and enjoy ourselves. . . . Kind of get it off the commercial level and—"

"Take 'em out to dinner?" Tony cried. "Are you crazy? Who the hell do you think these gals are—society?"

"No, but they're worth talking to, aren't they?" I asked.

"Worth talking to?" Tony was going apoplectic. "Cripes, they're worth a couple of grand a month, but who wants to talk to 'em?"

I started to laugh, then casually turned to see if the fellow at my left had heard our conversation. Obviously he had, because he was smiling broadly. He was a tall, good-looking lad about thirty to thirty-two years old,

quite obviously Indian but of high birth judging by the regularity of his features, clear brown eyes, long thin face, aquiline nose and strong, chiseled jaw. He was dressed conservatively in black with a kind of white ascot tie; wound tightly around his head was a smooth-fitting black silk turban. The outfit didn't attract my attention particularly, except for the fine quality of the materials and the excellent tailoring. Many wealthy Indians—merchants or professional men—dressed similarly, in contrast to the almost universal white linens worn by the Europeans and British of Calcutta.

My own outfit—tan military cap with silver C.N.A.C. insignia above the peak, gabardine open-necked tunic with wings on the breast, and tan slacks—marked me instantly, of course, as a C.N.A.C. pilot. Tony's uniform, of U. S. Army officer's quality and cut, and bearing the insignia of a U. S. Transportation Adviser, just as easily identified him.

The Indian looked us over quickly, still smiling, and then he said to me, "You have more in common with my people than your friend. We, too, think conversation has a place in romance." He spoke perfect English by Oxford standards, having a pronounced British accent.

Tony snorted, rubbing a thick, calloused hand through his heavy black beard. He had stopped shaving shortly before the time Gingiss and I met him in November, and he already had a bush that would take the average man at least a year to cultivate. "I don't know who was talkin' about romance," he said. "Certainly not me."

Both Tony's and the Indian's glasses were empty and I signaled the bartender. He came running, saying, "Yes, Sahib!" and then, as his glance touched that of the stranger, he bowed deeply and murmured something I didn't understand.

"These shall be on me," the Indian said. "Whatever the gentlemen wish."

I started to protest, but the bartender shot me a look almost of fright as he bowed again and said, "Of course, Your Highness."

The Indian smiled at the startled expressions on Tony and myself, and he bowed very graciously. Then he held out his hand and said, "Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, Maharajah of Cooch Behar, gentlemen. It is a pleasure to meet you."

Tony and I introduced ourselves and shook hands, and for over an hour the three of us stood there talking about the C.N.A.C. and the new Ledo Road, which was Tony's special interest at the moment. And then, when the Maharajah learned that I had flown with the Air Transport Auxiliary of the R.A.F., the two of us fell into reminiscences about England. "Vince"—as he asked us to refer to him—had gone to school in England, had taken his degree at Oxford, which explained the accent as well as the easy social manner. I told him about Gingiss hunting ducks in a Hurricane fighter over the king's private preserves at Windsor Park, and nothing would do but that I promise to introduce him to Gingiss at the earliest oppor-

tunity. "Amazing!" Vince exclaimed. "Must be an extraw-din'ry character!"

The Maharajah was much interested in aviation and knew quite a bit about planes. When I asked him if he were a pilot himself, he said, "No, I am not—although I suppose I should have taken it up. But it always seemed easier to have someone else do the work. That way I could just sit quietly, look down upon the clouds and this great India of ours, and meditate. I owned a Lockheed Ten before the war and my pilot was one of the best fliers I've ever known, an American boy named Mickelson. When he joined the Flying Tigers I sold my plane because I knew I would never get anyone as good as Micky until this war was over."

Al Gingiss was with Tony and me in the club a few days later when we ran into the Maharajah again, and it was on that occasion, after he had heard Gingiss' own heroic account of the Battle of the King's Ducks over Windsor Park, that he promised us some real hunting on one of his own estates in upper India near Tangsawa. "Maybe it won't compare to machine-gunning royal ducks," he laughed, "but I think you'll have some fun. I'll arrange everything for you—elephants and native guides and guns and all that. It's good hunting country up there, especially for tigers and leopards." He hesitated a moment and then said, "But maybe you'd prefer hunting wild boar? That's wonderful sport, you know."

I didn't know anything of the sort. I had never even

seen a wild boar and all I had ever heard about them was that they usually did all the killing.

"You hunt boar with a spear, you know," the Maharajah went on. "It's really quite thrilling."

Gingiss looked at him with an expression of distaste. "Hell, that's just pig-sticking," he said. "I'd rather bag me a tiger. A man doesn't get a chance like this every day in his life—and stickin' pigs just ain't glamorous, that's all."

Gingiss' words were weighted with wisdom, so a tiger hunt it was. The Maharajah didn't accompany us, but three days before our leave was up we flew back to Dinjan and were met there by one of the Indian potentate's servants in a luxurious big Buick station wagon. It was a good hard ride over a difficult jungle road to Vince's hunting lodge at Cooch Behar, and when we arrived there we were dined lavishly in the huge palatial building. In the morning, after a fine big breakfast, we stepped out onto the porch to get our first look at the accoutrements of a first-class Indian safari.

Three elephants stood in the driveway, one behind the other, and on their backs were strapped huge canopied chairs. Behind the chairs were rolls of bedding and great folds of canvas tenting and mosquito netting. Moving around near the animals were six native boys, or "bearers," who jumped at the orders of the Number One Boy, a tall, dark-skinned fellow of middle age whose authority over his helpers was never questioned. Under his supervision the sacks and boxes of food and ammunition

were carefully checked over and loaded on three of the boys' backs. The other boys helped Gingiss and Tony and myself to climb up on the elephants, then they handed up our weapons—fine big .30-.30 rifles—and gathered up their own bows and arrows and Ghurka knives and spears.

"Teek hai?" the Number One Boy called.

"Achcha," I replied, and the boy prodded my elephant with the point of his spear to start the safari on its way.

"What was that you said back there?" Tony asked after a moment, as we headed off across the grounds of the lodge toward the jungle. "It sounded like 'hotcha.'"

I spelled the word I had pronounced and told him what it meant: simply "yes." The Number One Boy's question, "Teek hai?" is the Hindustani equivalent of "Is everything okay?" or, "Are you all set?" I had picked up a smattering of the language from the servants at the cottage at Dinjan, and I taught Tony a few of the words and phrases that he would be likely to need during the hunt. "Idhar ow," meaning "Come here"; "Jao," meaning "Go," and "Jaldi jao," meaning "Go quickly." "Che mangte hai?"—"what do you want?" "Teek na hai"—"no good."

The state of Cooch Behar, of which Vince is ruler, looks pretty small on the map, but when you start roving around through its jungles on the back of a ponderous, slow-moving elephant it doesn't seem small at all. It is one of the most productive small districts in India, Vince had once proudly told us, being about three-fourths cul-

tivated, and producing high-grade crops of tea and rice and tobacco; but the northeast section, through which our safari crawled with the speed of a lazy snail for the next few days, was virtually all jungle. Only occasionally did we emerge from the thick growth of steaming ever-green forest to plod for an hour or so across the cleared area of a tea plantation or a wide field of swampy rice paddies.

As soon as the sun began to set each day we would find ourselves coming into a natural clearing in the jungle or emerging onto cultivated land, and the Number One Boy would direct the porters in setting up a camp for the night. We marveled at the way he could calculate our traveling time and our direction with neither watch nor compass, but he never failed to bring us to a comfortable camping place at the day's end. At times, when we came upon a small settlement where one jungle trail crossed another, he would carry on a brief conversation with the residents in his Hindustani, and I knew enough of the language to know he was asking directions; but most of the time he seemed to know the territory as well as the people who lived there.

Our luck was bad during the four-day hunt, for we found nothing to shoot at in all that time except a few wild boars. But in the afternoon of the last day, when we were just a few hours from the lodge, we suddenly heard a low growl off to our left. The boy leading my elephant, which was first in line, made a signal and the rest of the troupe stopped. We stood there a moment listening, but

all we could hear was the chatter of monkeys and the thin sound of small animals moving about in the trees and through the tall grass. The growl wasn't repeated.

We started off again, and when I saw how my boy was carrying his bow and arrow I hitched my rifle a little closer into the crook of my arm, resting the long barrel across my knees. My hand was close to the trigger, and nothing that moved within ten feet of that trail escaped me.

We had gone about a hundred yards from the spot where we thought we had heard the growl when Gingiss, riding directly behind me, let out a yell. The native boys jumped, bringing their weapons into shooting position. (Later my boy told me that yelling in the jungle was an excellent way of getting killed. It scared hell out of everybody in the party and amounted to a direct challenge to any animal within earshot.) But that didn't alter the fact that Gingiss had yelled—and the next thing I knew there was a crashing in the underbrush and a big, lean streak of brown came hurtling through the air with its two clawed paws reaching for Gingiss. At the same time Al's native boy crouched; there was a zinging sound; the tiger twitched violently in mid-air, and his leap fell short. But he was within four feet of Gingiss, and the arrow in his shoulder didn't seem to be troubling him at all as he crouched for the leap that looked like sudden death for the hero of the Battle of the King's Ducks.

Then there was a terrific report as Gingiss' .30-.30 went off, and the tiger leaped a good three feet off the

round and fell in a heap in the tall grass about two feet from the elephant.

I had been watching the tiger, naturally, and I had my own rifle poised for a shot just as Al's gun went off. I was most disappointed when I heard his shot. I was lowering my gun when there was a violent crash among the reeds on the other side of the trail. Alert as a jackal, I swung around, prepared and thirsting for a shot at the tiger's mate, whom I pictured swooping down on us from that side—and there in the grass lay Gingiss. He had got halfway out of his chair to fire his rifle and its violent kick had thrown him overboard.

Examination of the tiger's pelt showed that it wouldn't be much of a prize to take home. The fur was quite thin with spots (very large spots) and Gingiss' bullet had gone through the best part of one side and out the best part of the other. The native boy's arrow had cut a jagged hole in the only other really nice section of the skin, so the whole affair was rather disappointing. Al's boy, however, told us that there was a man near the lodge who made a business of capturing tigers and leopards just so he could get their teeth. He cared neither for their pelts nor their meat, but he made a nice living selling their teeth to the natives to wear as charms.

"Well, that's swell," Gingiss said generously. "I don't care about the pelt anyway. We'll just bring the beast back to the lodge and make a present of him to Vince's neighbor."

So we did. We made rather a ceremony of it, in fact.

Tony had brought along a bottle of Bourbon—in addition to half a dozen bottles of the Scotch he and Gingiss favored—and that night, after we had returned to the lodge and had supper and got cleaned up, we set out for the neighbor's place. Three of the native boys carried the tiger between them and another boy bore the special gift of Bourbon. It was a very impressive retinue. When we arrived in front of the neighbor's cottage the boys laid down the huge carcass and we called out a greeting to our host. In a few moments he appeared, a tall, bearded fellow with three or four women and a swarm of children at his heels. It was obvious enough that he didn't know what we were there for, and Gingiss, instead of letting one of our boys explain the nature of our visit, bent down and opened the jaws of his prostrate tiger. "Teeth—teeth!" Gingiss exclaimed. "For you—our friend!"

The old fellow stared at Gingiss, then nodded violently with a huge grin. Obviously he understood. He walked up to the tiger, glanced briefly at the pelt, and bent down to examine the teeth. Slowly his hand went to his long black beard. He tugged at it thoughtfully for a moment. Then he stood up, puffed out his chest, and glared at us. For fully a minute he just stared, his glassy black eyes going from Tony to me, to Gingiss. Then he rattled off a line of chatter that would fill half a dozen pages in small script; after which he turned on his heel and disappeared into his cottage.

"What the hell is this?" Gingiss demanded, turning to

the Number One Boy—the only one on hand who could translate the tirade into English.

The boy was obviously embarrassed. He was the one who had suggested this neighborly overture. "Teek na hai, Master," the boy said. "Sahib say tiger, he so old he teeth no worth damn. He say you shoot tiger so old you shame you self. He say maybe you find tiger dead some place. He no like Yankee joke."

When I returned to duty at Dinjan two new boys were assigned to my plane, a co-pilot named Hung and a radio operator named Li. They were smart boys, both of them, but on our third trip together I had one of the worst experiences of my flying career with Hung.

We were coming back from Kunming with a load of tin and the overcast was soup-thick all the way up to 24,000 feet. The plane I was given was an experimental model with special supercharged engines, designed to permit greater altitude than the DC-3's and C-47's whose ceiling was 24,500 feet.

At 25,000 feet we came out above the overcast. The temperature at that altitude was far below zero. The heater in the plane wasn't working very well, and an added disadvantage was that we had been using our oxygen almost constantly since leaving Kunming four hours before.

We were over the most dangerous part of the hills, about an hour out of Dinjan, with known peaks rising as high as 24,000 feet, when this boy Hung suddenly hol-

lered, "Boohow! Boohow!" In Chinese that meant "No good!" I jerked around to see what was wrong. Hung immediately grabbed the controls and shot the plane down in a steep dive into the overcast. With a load of tin you just don't do things like that for fear of shifting the cargo, and anyway I couldn't see anything wrong. I reached out, knocking his hands from the controls, righted the ship and started to climb up again.

Everything was all right for about five minutes. Twice I asked Hung what the hell he was trying to do, but he didn't answer. He continued to stare directly ahead and kept his hands clenched in his lap. The overcast was climbing higher by then, we were going right into it, and I was busy with the instruments, checking our position against the known peaks in the vicinity. And when you're under oxygen for a long stretch you doublecheck those things because it's easy to get careless—woozy—the stuff is so much like a drug.

Without warning this time Hung grabbed the controls again. He really had a death grip on them, and he was heading us straight down into almost certain death. I had no alternative. I reached over, pulled off his oxygen mask with my right hand, loosened my safety belt and came around in a roundhouse with my left, catching him squarely on the jaw. His head bobbed over on his shoulder, his hands relaxed on the controls, and I pulled out of the dive. I don't know how close we came to disaster because I couldn't see a hundred feet ahead of me. According to my charts we should have hit a 23,000 foot

peak at that point, and I'm sure we must have missed it by only a few seconds. In any event, I replaced the oxygen mask on Hung's limp face and we got back to 26,620 feet and made the crossing without further trouble.

We were down to about 7000 feet and within sight of Dinjan when Hung slowly roused himself and began to feel his chin.

"What the hell happened to you?" I demanded. I still felt I hadn't settled my score with him.

Hung looked at me, startled. "Nothing, Captain," he said. "I—I'm all right."

"What was our highest altitude?" I asked him.

"Eighteen thousand, sir," he replied instantly.

"You don't remember going above 18,000?" I asked.

"No, sir. We haven't been above 18,000," Hung said.

"What are you rubbing your jaw for?"

"It's sore. I must have bumped it, I don't remember. . . . I don't know when . . ."

Hung was too good a boy to do what he had done unless he was out of his head, and by the time we landed I could make a pretty good guess as to the cause of his conduct. To some extent it was typical of the Chinese, even the smart ones like Hung. Little details irk them; they aren't naturally scientific in their thinking or in their conduct; and if they can't see the immediate value of a procedure or a policy they are likely to figure it is unimportant. That may not be true of all Chinese, but it is definitely true of the ones I have known. It was true of Hung.

"Let's see your mask," I said to him as soon as we stepped out of the plane at Dinjan.

He handed it to me and I tilted it. A good half-ounce of water ran out into my hand. I shook the water from my palm and handed the mask back to him.

"If that ever happens again, Hung," I said, "I'm going to report you."

The most dangerous mistake a person can make who is dependent on an oxygen mask is to let the condensed moisture from his breath remain in the mask after using it. The orders are specific in that regard: you drain your mask and dry it every time you use it. Hung had failed to do so, and in the intense cold above 18,000 feet a little clot of ice had formed in the tube, almost completely blocking off his oxygen supply. Most people would have fainted under such circumstances; Hung had gone batty instead.

When we had returned to Dinjan after that first—but not last—safari in Tongsawa, Al and I had met an old friend. We hadn't known he was coming, that he had signed on with the C.N.A.C. But there he was when we stepped into the lounge of the pilots' quarters that evening.

"Petach!" Al and I cried at the same time.

"Hi, you old bastards!" Short Stride replied. For a good five minutes the three of us clapped each other on the back and cursed and swore and laughed and talked all together and, in general, acted like a bunch of nitwits.

But then it's a long way from India to England, and that was the last place we had seen Short Stride Petach. That was a real reunion.

Petach had never known Bill Fox until that day he arrived at Dinjan, but between the time the plane came in from Calcutta and Gingiss and I got back from Tongsawa those two boys had become good friends. Of course, Skippy Lane and Privensal were there too, and they had known Petach in England, but it was odd in view of later developments that Short Stride and Fox got on so well from the first.

Petach went through the same routine after his arrival that the rest of us had gone through when we came. Various boys on different days were assigned to go up with him, fly across the Hump, or do practice approaches to the fields at either end of the run, check and test him on his instrument work, go over his maps with him.

Bill Fox drew more of those assignments with Petach than anyone else, and as I recall, the first time Short Stride took a plane off the field at Dinjan and landed at Kunming he was at the controls as co-pilot to Fox.

Petach checked out in short order as a full-fledged C.N.A.C. flight captain, and it was on the eleventh of March that he and Fox and I took off in a three-plane formation from Kunming, carrying a load of tin back to Dinjan. We had overloaded our planes with tin on that trip—that is, loaded them beyond usual capacity—because there had recently been little Jap activity in the

south and the weather was good on that route. We could figure on flying at no more than 13,000 feet all the way across. Thus we would use less gas—and less gas meant more cargo.

The tin load consisted of ingots weighing about 120 pounds each, long bars roped together in very loose and uncertain bales. The hope and prayer of the crew was always that the load would stay in approximately the same position all through the trip that it was in on the take-off. But those hopes were not always fulfilled, nor the prayers inevitably answered.

From Kunming to the region around Yungping we encountered nothing but smooth flying weather. We held to an altitude of around ten thousand feet and rode along without threat from either Japs or storms, with a good two hundred feet between our planes and the blanket of white clouds below. It was not until we hit the lower reaches of the Santsungshan range, about midway between Assam and Kunming, that we encountered the last obstacle. As we approached the 11,400-foot peaks near Tating and went into a slow climb to give those snow-capped hazards plenty of room, I began to feel the pressure of turbulent winds. With my controls set to climb I would feel the C-53 move slowly upward for a moment, then veer off to the right or left and drop quite suddenly, throwing the altimeter back anywhere from one hundred to one thousand feet. With a load of tin ingots, that is dangerous business, because not only is the drop sudden but the corrective measures are equally

abrupt. I pulled back hard on the stick trying to recover my altitude, always having in mind that too steep a climb might unsettle the cargo. I was in the lead of the three-plane wedge formation and, looking back, I could see Petach and Fox having the same trouble.

To turn back or seriously to alter our course at that point was out of the question; we hadn't met obstacles serious enough to send us back to Kunming, and our gasoline supply wasn't sufficient to permit much searching around for an easier route. We stayed on the course, straining to gain altitude and bucking the winds. I picked up 11,000 feet at one point and thought I was in the clear; then a downdraft drove me down almost to 10,000 in spite of the fact that I held the ship at a 45-degree angle to take advantage of the updrafts rising against the sides of the hill. I had the controls practically in my lap and the air speed was down to only ninety miles per hour. I was so close to the clouds surrounding the peaks that the belly of the plane splashed into them now and then, sending a wave of vapor over the windshield.

We were just pulling out of one wave of enveloping mist when Petach came in on the interplane radio: "Pete to Gen! Pete to Gen! Over."

I replied, "Gen to Pete—what's cookin'? Over."

"Pete to Gen—we better head back. What do you say? Over."

"Gen to Pete—no, it's as bad behind as it is ahead. We'll be out of it in a minute. Keep coming. Approach ranges at 45 degrees. Use plenty of RPM. Over."

Just then another downsweep caught me and I had to fight the controls. I knew there was a peak within seconds of me that was 11,400 feet and my altimeter read 10,800 feet. The cloud formation was beginning to climb with us; it lay like a shroud over the Santsungshan hills.

Glancing back to either side, I could see Fox off to my left and Petach to the right. Their planes looked weird, fighting through that invisible storm. One moment they would be leveled out and climbing; the next they would be veering off to right or left, caught in a draft I had just come out of, and sinking sometimes completely out of sight in the cotton-white banks of cloud.

The highest peak on the route we had mapped out was just west of Shueiching, 12,260 feet. As we approached that range the winds became more and more turbulent. Except for the two 850-horsepower engines driving the ship forward, it was almost like flying a glider: holding the air and holding the course depended entirely upon how we played our wing surfaces against those violent surges of wind—one rushing up the slope of a hill, the next sweeping over the top and, chilled by the ice-capped ridge, plunging viciously downward to supplant the warmer air below.

Hung, my co-pilot, was as cool under that threat of sudden death as any man I ever saw. He sat there, ready at any moment to take the controls at my briefest signal, yet with his hands folded in his lap and his smooth Oriental face in complete repose. To look at him you might have thought he was a sightseer on the upper deck

of a Fifth Avenue bus. If he had been stupid I would have thought he didn't know what was going on, but Hung wasn't stupid. He knew—he just wasn't afraid.

There was a long moment of smooth flying, and I thought we had outdistanced the disturbed winds, when suddenly the plane lurched violently and we were driven deep into the overcast. I knew that the 12,260-foot peak was almost within touching distance, and when the altimeter slid from 12,500 to 11,900 my heart was in my mouth. I could expect only one thing—a crash. I pulled the ship into a right-hand chandelle, belly flat toward the hill, nose high and wings at 45 degrees. I couldn't see a thing, the gray blanket of cloud was all around us, and I had a horrible feeling that this was it. Then, as though a light had been snapped on in a darkened movie theater, there was a break in the clouds and we saw sunlight again—sunlight on the long and ice-crust-ed slopes of Shueiching, beautiful and gleaming, but much too close. We missed that peak by less than a hundred yards. As we climbed above it, our motors pulling hard into a wind that wanted to force us down, I heard Hung gasp. He was looking behind us.

I couldn't look then. I had to get the plane above the peak, into the clear; but I looked back in time to see Petach and Fox in their heroic fight against death. I saw Petach's ship miss the Shueiching peak by not more than twenty feet and I saw Fox crash into it, head on.

We could have gone back, Petach and I. We could have gone back when we saw Bill crash. But we could not

have landed; we could only have seen the flames spring out of the ship and burn its occupants alive. We could have tried to land—and left two more ships and six more men to mark the grave. We could have been as heroic as hell—and as foolish. When Petach got drunk a few nights later he talked that way. “We should have gone back . . .” But what for?

Skippy Lane was usually a pretty quiet guy, but that night when Short Stride began to sound off Skippy really said a mouthful. “You’ve got to remember, Short Stride,” he said, “some guys want to win medals—and some guys want to win wars.”

Our troubles hadn’t ended with our crossing of the Santsungshan hills. Between there and Dinjan we ran into dense cloud formations that would break suddenly, just as they had over Shueiching, and leave us completely in the open. The first time that happened I glanced down from our 13,000-foot altitude and saw three Zeros directly below me at about 10,000 feet. More cloud lay in a thick bank about two minutes ahead, and as the Zeros spotted Petach and me and spread out to come up at us I gave the plane full throttle and started rattling off Acts of Contrition.

Those Zeros climb fast, and if the Japs had been a little sharper with their gunnery they might have bagged both of us. As it was, the two that came up under me got in only one good burst between them, and the bullets lodged in the load of tin in the belly of the plane. Petach’s plane wasn’t hit at all. By the time the Zeros had got

above us and were ready to give us the real works from top side we were easing into the clouds again.

I had noticed a bad tail drag to the ship as we raced for the cover of the clouds, indicating that the cargo had shifted during the jolting we had taken in the turbulent winds, and I knew it would be impossible to do any skillful maneuvering in case we ran into more enemy planes unless we righted the load. I turned the controls over to Hung and, with Li to help me, went back into the cabin. We started heaving the 120-pound ingots forward from where they had drifted into the tail. We had almost all of the load righted when Hung yelled, "Japs, Captain!"

I made a dash for the cockpit and grabbed the controls. We had come out into the clear again; directly above us, already peeling off for a murderous dive, were three Zeros—undoubtedly the same three that had attacked us before. I pushed the controls forward in a steep dive. Below us at about 10,000 feet lay a nice thick cushion of alto cumulus. We got into it before a single Jap bullet touched the plane, but knowing that at least two of the three Zeros were diving fast right behind me, I had my heart in my mouth as I leveled out. An instant later I heard a terrific roar and the plane rocked from the prop wash of his ship as the Jap flashed past our nose. I think he must have missed crashing into us by no more than a few feet, possibly inches.

We couldn't stay in that cloud formation very long because there were mountains in the district whose peaks were higher than our altitude of 10,000 feet, so after a

few minutes I started to climb. I checked with Petach on the radio, found that he was okay, too, and I told him I was going upstairs—way up, where I figured the Japs probably wouldn't look for us. I started to climb and got up to 23,000 feet before coming out above the clouds. A couple of minutes later Petach came out, too, and I heard his sigh of relief through my earphones.

About fifty minutes out of Dinjan my oxygen was getting pretty low, so I decided to drop down into the clouds and taper off on the mask. I had already shut off Li's supply and the kid was in a funk, crouched back there in the radio compartment. When we got down to 16,000 feet, however, we ran into more turbulent winds. I fought them for a few minutes, struggling to keep the ship level, but in spite of my best efforts I could feel the cargo beginning to shift again. I signaled to Hung to take off his mask and headed back upstairs. Petach hadn't come down after us, so I reported what I had found.

"Pete to Gen—you've got to have a feel for that sort of thing, my boy," Petach said, being very patronizing. "I knew you'd run into that. Just felt it in my bones. I guess you aren't cut out for this kind of work. Over."

"Nuts, you silly son of a —" I began, but just then a tight formation of four fighter planes appeared above me and to the left. They were just starting to peel off for the kill when I spotted them, and I yelled at Petach, "Dive for it, brother! There they are again!"

I was already diving by then, and I didn't see any more of Petach. I got into the clouds safely, perfectly satisfied

to fight the turbulent winds for the next ten minutes. Then I called to Petach. "Think it's safe to come out yet, Short Stride?" I asked.

"Sure, dearie," Petach said. "I never even went down. Those weren't Zeros—they were P-40's!"

Petach made quite a story out of it that night at the cottage, and the laughs were all on me. The next morning, however, I got to talking with one of the Army pilots at the field. He said he had been flying one of those P-40's and that he had never seen a transport plane dive any faster than mine when they peeled off at us. The Army men thought we were Jap bombers, and this lad said he would have picked off Petach, who had been slow to dive, like a sitting duck if he hadn't noticed the C.N.A.C. insignia just as he was about to pull the trigger. It hadn't been until Pete saw the fighters pull up without firing a shot that he realized they were our planes.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Crash Landing Into the Hump

WE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH to read at the cottage at Dinjan, so every time we returned from Calcutta we brought back some magazines or sometimes a book or two. I don't know who it was that brought in the January 17 issue of *Peek*, but whoever it was I love him as a brother. One of the pictures in that magazine had a profound effect on my life.

She was blonde, the girl in this picture. Blonde and blue-eyed and built like—well, like only one girl in all the world, Gerry Ewing. That was her name. She was pictured with a group of other girls who danced with her at Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe in New York. They all wore little-girl costumes with short, flouncy ruffled skirts, big sashes around their waists and colored bows in their hair. Gerry was sitting on the floor reading a

book at a kid party, and I sat there in the lounge of our cottage on the other side of the world moaning softly to myself.

The other pilots began to gather around to see what was bothering me. When they saw that picture the wolf in them came to the surface with a chorus of low whistles, deep sighs, and smacking lips. Petach, in a frenzy, grabbed the magazine out of my hands; Bob Robertson snatched it away from him; I leaped on Robertson, but too late. Lane had it by then, his eyes bulging as he devoured the beauty of that page. I was in agony for fear the sheet would be torn—and then Gingiss, Solomon-like, saved the day. He picked up a chair, balancing it over Skippy's head.

"Put that picture down, Brother Lane," he said. "We'll settle this thing in gentlemanly fashion, before someone gets killed."

Skippy obliged under the threat of the raised chair and Gingiss explained his plan.

"That girl is definitely a prize, boys," Gingiss said. "She has everything—and when I say everything, I mean to include that gorgeous soft white thigh which some of you may not have noticed—like hell! But we can't all have that girl. We can't all even dream of having her. Only one of us can be that lucky. We'll draw lots, and the lucky winner will get the picture all for himself; he'll be permitted to dream about her all he wants; he may even write her a letter. In fact, I think that ought to be one of the conditions. The winner will have to write her a letter,

and if she replies he'll have to read her letter aloud to all of us. He'll have to read us his letter, too, before he sends it."

"The hell with all that!" I yelled. "She's mine. I found her and she's mine."

"No, she isn't," Gingiss insisted. "And if you insist on arguing about it there's going to be a riot here and we'll be killing each other like dogs. There'll be blood and guts all over the place and the houseboys will never get their work done tomorrow with all that cleaning up to do. Come on now, we'll cut cards to see who writes this daisy a letter."

I was given the privilege of drawing the first card. Gingiss shuffled them and at least four of the wolves cut them to make sure they weren't stacked. I picked up the top card, turned it over. It was the ace of spades.

My letter to Gerry Ewing was a masterpiece in many ways, but I still don't know why she never answered it. Even to this day she has never given me a good explanation for that little bit of rudeness. "I intended to at first," she says, "but I didn't know exactly what to say, and finally I just forgot about it . . ."

Two of the boys who took part in the brief melee over Gerry's picture that night were Joe Rosbert and "Ridge" Hammel, both of Pennsylvania. Joe had been a Flying Tiger before signing on with C.N.A.C. and Ridge had only recently joined us, having transferred from Pan-American's African branch. Ridge hadn't checked out yet as a flight captain on the Himalaya run and was flying as

a co-pilot, usually with Rosbert. They were scheduled to take off the morning following the discussion over the picture a half an hour after me on the run to Kunming. The weather was mean even on the ground that day; the monsoon season was well begun, and rain had been lashing the field all night. It was still pouring down as I waded through the muck from the flight office to my plane.

The first plane out every morning always took about a half-hour start on the others and radioed back information about the weather and any Jap activity noticed along the way. In view of the Zeros Petach and I had run into on the southern route the day before, I took the northern route this time, even though I realized, because of the drop in temperature overnight, that I would probably be heading into an ice storm.

I got the ice all right—the hard, clear kind that stuck to the wings and props in chunks—and I was calling back messages every few minutes as I tried to climb above the stuff. A new radio operator had been assigned to me that day, and he was as busy as a bird dog with his instruments. After Rosbert took off I talked directly with him over the phones. Li Wong, the radio operator who had been flying with me the previous two weeks, incidentally, had been transferred to Rosbert's ship. About an hour out of the base I decided to head south. The plane was so loaded with ice I couldn't get it above 17,000 feet—not high enough to go over the Hump on the northern route—so I had either to go back to Dinjan or take a chance on

getting far enough south to melt off the ice, and then go on to Kunming, provided the Japs didn't stop me.

The ice storm was moving west, apparently, because Rosbert ran into it a shorter distance out of Dinjan than I had twenty-five or thirty minutes before. When I told him that I was going to head south I also told him why. "If I tried to get back to the base I'd take on a double load, Joe, and I'm too heavy right now to risk it."

"Okay, Gen," Rosbert replied. "But I'm not as far out as you are. I think I'll head back and wait for it to clear up. You don't know but what it's almost as bad farther south, and then you'll crash for sure . . ."

That was the last we heard of Joe Rosbert and Ridge Hammel until forty-nine days later when they came rumbling out of the jungle on a British Army truck and were carried into the field office at Dinjan in the strong arms of the British Tommies who had driven them in.

So far as is known, no white man ever before had seen the part of the world where Rosbert and Hammel crashed in their ice-encrusted plane; and surely no two men of any color or creed ever had a closer scrape with death. As I got the story during its many retellings at the cottage, before Rosbert headed back to the States to recover his health and get a bone-setting job done on his shattered ankle, his plane took on a double load of ice when he tried to get back to Dinjan. In his efforts to keep above the jagged mountain peaks thrusting up all around him he took advantage of every updraft and cross wind regardless of how far they blew him off his course. But he kept

gathering ice, and at last, out of the grayness beyond his windshield, a mountain peak virtually leaped at him. Instinctively, Rosbert swung hard on the controls to veer away, but it was too late. An instant later there was a terrific crash, and a jolt that snapped his right ankle like a matchstick and broke the neck of poor Li Wong, the Chinese boy who had been my radio operator until that morning. Ridge Hammel's right ankle was badly sprained—making it pretty evident that no rudder had ever been kicked harder by pilot and co-pilot together than their right rudder was in that instant when the mountain appeared directly in their path.

For three days the two men lived in the shelter of their mangled cabin, Rosbert in an agony of pain from his broken ankle, Hammel of little use to himself or his friend because of his own injury as well as the intense sub-zero cold that threatened to freeze them to death before the still-raging blizzard had died down. They hadn't even the strength to bury poor Li, but could only spread out his parachute and lay it over his body. On the third day, when their emergency rations were just about gone, the storm cleared, and Hammel dragged himself out of the ship to discover that they were within crawling distance of a steep, snow-packed decline. Studying the terrain below, Hammel noticed that the slope continued for several miles before reaching the scrubby black fringe of the timber line. He saw a chance for them to cover that entire distance without using their feet at all. He crawled back to the plane, explained his plan to Rosbert, and

CRASH LANDING

between them they bandaged their ankles with strips of parachute silk. Then they tore up a couple of floorboards from the plane's cabin and set out on probably the most colossal sleigh ride in the history of that sport.

All day long the two boys worked their way down the mountain from one ice-capped ridge to another. They crawled on hands and knees from the foot of one decline to the top of another, mounted their individual "sleds," and, pushing over the edge, dropped hundreds of yards in a few breathtaking seconds—sliding to a stop one time, slamming violently against a jutting ledge of ice another. Then they crawled on to the next decline.

Rosbert had a pocket compass with him, and after they reached the timber line they held to a course roughly southwest, figuring that it would take them—if they lived long enough—to the neighborhood of Dinjan. There was a hundred miles between them and the field, however, the unexplored, unmapped territory of the Mishmi Hills, which are inhabited by aboriginal tribes of Mishmi-ites. It was almost two weeks after Rosbert and Hammel crashed on the mountain peak before they found the first signs of human life. A few hours later they crawled into a clearing and saw a small mud hut with a wisp of smoke curling out through a hole in the thatched roof.

"At any other time in my life that hut would have looked pretty miserable," Joe Rosbert told us. "But at that moment, just when we felt we couldn't crawl another inch—half starved and racked with pain, bruised and battered and our clothes in ribbons from falling and

climbing and tearing our way through those hills—brother, that hut looked like Shangri La!”

The Mishmi-ites, whenever we had heard them mentioned before, had always been referred to as head-hunters, but they showed no inclination to decapitate Rosbert and Hammel. In fact they grew to like their guests, and were much impressed by the white men's watches, cigarette lighters, and the zippers on their tattered flying jackets. When Rosbert produced a mechanical pencil and started drawing pictures on a piece of bark, showing an airplane flying through the air and crashing into a mountain, his fame spread through the hills like wildfire. Men, women, and children from other tribes came to see these wonders. Finally, one day, a young boy came, an unusually bright-looking youngster, and after watching Joe draw pictures for a while he tried to explain that he wasn't satisfied with that; he wanted something different, something better. He pointed to Joe and then to the bark. Joe pictured himself in the plane, but that wouldn't do. He drew himself without the plane, and that was better but still not right. Then the boy said the Mishmi word for “name”—which was one of the two hundred words Joe and Ridge picked up during their month with the tribe—and Ridge laughed and said, “Hell, Joe, he wants your autograph.”

Joe wrote his name on the bark and the boy got all excited. He was impatient to get his hands on it. Joe was just about to give it to him when it dawned on him what this bright youngster had in mind. In a fever of

excitement he tore off the corner of a map he had brought with him and wrote more words, explaining who he and Hammel were and telling what had happened to them. The boy grabbed the paper and ran from the hut. Four days later he returned with a letter from the officer in command of a British scouting force saying that supplies were on their way and a medical officer would soon follow. Supplies of food and clothes—even cigarettes—arrived by native porters a few hours later, and a couple of days after that the doctor appeared. They were on the way back to civilization—probably the most remarkable return from the unknown world of Lower Tibet that any white men have ever made.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Margot of Karaya Road

THERE IS A GIRL in Calcutta whose name is Margot. Or perhaps it should be put this way: Margot lives in the Orient, in a city called Calcutta. No one who has been to India in recent years is unfamiliar with her name. She maintains a beautiful apartment in the city, but her place of business is a great white house at 57 Karaya Road in the rollicking red-light district of suburban Ballygange.

I heard of Margot for the first time that day at the 300 Club when Tony Mercede mentioned her—the day we met the Maharajah of Cooch Behar. Tony had been incredulous when I asked him who she was, and after I had been in India a few months I couldn't blame him at all for that reaction. Margot is only about twenty-five years old, but already her prowess in the oldest profession has made her a legend throughout the Far East.

Several years ago there was a sensational murder in Bombay. A prominent young British doctor was shot down in cold blood as he stepped through the front door of his little cottage in one of the better residential neighborhoods. There were no witnesses to the affair and the murderer went unapprehended for almost a week. The doctor's young and beautiful wife was prostrated with grief, unable for days to give the police any help. In fact, her insistence that she knew of no reason why anyone would want to kill her husband, together with her prostration—which the newspapers began to hint might be feigned—made her excellent material for scores of sensational news stories. The pictures accompanying the stories, revealing her startling beauty, gave the affair a quality of glamor and drama that was the newshawks' meat. By the time the killer gave himself up, the gorgeous young widow was one of the most widely known persons in India.

Then it turned out that this young widow knew the murderer, had known him for years. He was a man only slightly older than the doctor, her deceased husband, and prior to her marriage some two years earlier she occasionally had dates with this other man. She insisted that she hadn't seen the man since the day of her wedding—but nobody believed that. The killer himself said he hadn't seen the girl since her marriage—and no one believed him, either. To the newspapers and the general public it was quite clearly a "love triangle"; that these two secret lovers had conspired together to do away with

the young doctor. The killer's confession that his burning jealousy, held in check for two years, had finally burst its bonds, sending him out with a gun to shoot down the man who had married the girl he loved—that was regarded as an heroic bit of self-sacrifice on the killer's part; he was determined to keep his clandestine sweetheart in the clear. But the man in the street figured out his own story. Undoubtedly the beautiful young wife had put her husband "on the spot." She had virtually shoved him out the front door at the appointed time, when she knew her paramour would be out there waiting with his finger on the trigger.

The jury heard the plain facts of the case and concluded that the young man was guilty of murder. And they decided that the young widow had had no part in the crime, no knowledge of anything even remotely connected with it. There had been nothing between the killer and the doctor's wife after her marriage. She was given a clean legal bill of health.

"Bosh!" said the gossipy old ladies—male and female—who gathered in the clubs and cocktail bars of the city. And while the young widow was legally free to return to her little home and take up her respectable life where a murderer's bullet had temporarily broken it up, the fact of the matter was that she was disgraced. Sightseers made a morbid shrine of the house where she and her husband had lived. Thousands came to gawk at the steps on which the doctor had lain in a pool of blood. Every time she appeared in public, people would point and

whisper about her. She had no money of her own except the small sum in insurance that her husband had left her. She had to find work, and there was no work that she could obtain.

Thus did the little housewife of Bombay, with the blue-black hair and the olive skin and soft green eyes, with the smiling lips and graceful hands and supple, full-rounded figure become the famous mistress and chief courtesan of the house of riotous amours at 57 Karaya Road, in the suburbs of Calcutta.

I could be a louse and mention the names of the boys I was with the first time I met Margot—but I won't. The crowd was larger than it had ever been before on one of our sojourns in Calcutta. Because of that, to some extent, the general temper got a little out of hand. I mean, usually when a chap feels the baser passions he keeps them to himself; he submerges them in a few drinks or makes a friendly pass at the lady on the next bar stool, or he slinks quietly out the door and down the darker streets to a certain address which he enjoys going into but would hate like hell to be seen coming out of.

In a crowd it's different. At least it was that night in April when six of us from C.N.A.C. found ourselves with not much to do and a lot of dough in our pockets and a lot of pent-up vigor in our veins—and nothing particularly exciting afoot at the 300 Club or the Great Eastern Hotel. One of the boys mentioned Margot; a couple of the others were curious— Was she really all she was cracked

up to be?—and in a matter of minutes we were on our way out to Karaya Road.

My ideas of romance, as I've said before, do not and never have run to the cash-on-the-barrelhead variety. I hesitate to moralize on the question because undoubtedly there are two sides to it. It's an old truism that you always pay for what you get, and if romance is put on a business basis you know beforehand where you stand and where the lady stands. In the amateur leagues you may pay little for a lot, but you're just as likely to wind up paying one hell of a lot for damned little. One is an investment; the other is a gamble—and I've always fancied myself something of a gambler.

In any event, when we piled out of the cab in front of 57 Karaya Road and my five chums made a rush for the door of Margot's famous seraglio, I got a sudden case of jitters and took a quick slip off into the shadows. The boys all had their minds on something else and I wasn't missed at all.

It was a nice night, the moon hanging yellow and bright in a clear sky, and it was warm with the heat of the day and fragrant with the smells of tropical flowers. Up and down the road, arched over with thick-leaved trees, there were the sounds of small animals—monkeys (ever-present even in the cities) and dogs and cats and strange multi-colored birds that made weird noises in the night stillness. From within the wide-fronted white house came other sounds: soft music and gentle laughter, and once in a while a shrill cry, then a long, lingering giggle.

Margot's girls and their guests were enjoying themselves.

Our cab had pulled away and for a while no other customers drove up to the door. I had thought to remain in the shadows until the boys came out, fall in at the end of the line and pretend that I had been with them all the time. But when no other visitors arrived I decided to wander up and down and have a look at the place. After all, it was one of the most famous spots in all of India; I might as well be able to talk about the exterior with a familiarity that would seem to prove my acquaintance with the interior.

On the second floor of the house there were four windows facing the front, three of which were lighted. Shades were drawn but they were thin shades and the yellowish light shone dimly through. The fourth window was dark. As I strolled across in front of the place my attention was drawn to that window by a slight movement in front of the white casement. And then a voice, soft and husky and musical in the darkness, said, "Lonesome, soldier?"

I laughed as I peered up into the darkness, trying to get a glimpse of the speaker. "I'm no soldier," I said—although it was easy enough to understand her mistake because my C.N.A.C. uniform did look quite military—"but I am a little lonesome. How about coming down and keeping me company?"

There was a soft, throaty laugh from the balcony, and the husky voice said, "How about coming inside? I don't like to entertain on the street."

"I just want to talk," I said.

"Tired?" the voice inquired.

I laughed again. "Not particularly. I just feel more like talking than—well, anything else, at the moment."

"You came a long way to talk."

I was close to the balcony by then and in the dim moonlight I could get a glimpse of this siren-voiced creature. She wore a blue silk dressing-gown with jewels around the waist. And there was the blue-black hair in a crown with more jewels, and soft red lips and even features and smooth, firm, and fully packed figure.

"You're pretty," I said. "My name's Gen. What's yours?"

"Hello, Gen," she said. "They call me Margot."

"Margot?" I repeated, and I looked at her more closely. "I've got some pals in there—they came out here to see you. You aren't a very good hostess."

Margot laughed softly. "Too bad for your friends. This isn't one of my nights."

"Come on down, then, and take a walk."

For a moment she leaned there on the railing of the balcony, and then she said, "All right, Gen. I think I shall."

The C.N.A.C. is fast in the air, but its pilots are slow and patient in a woman's arms. Margot and I walked and talked and laughed and became friends in the two hours that C.N.A.C. was being represented within the cozy boudoirs of Margot's mansion on Karaya Road. When we

parted that night Margot and I had a date—a really historic date, not only for me but also for Margot.

“How about dinner tomorrow night?” I had asked her. “I’d like to take you some place where I could get a good look at you.”

“Come inside. There are bright lights in there,” Margot said.

“You wouldn’t look your best in there,” I said. “I want to see you at dinner in a nice club or hotel dining-room. I want to have an evening with you that would be real.”

Margot laughed. “You are silly,” she said. “You’re being very gallant—but you are silly—and you don’t mean it anyway.”

“I do mean it—and I’m quite serious,” I said. “I’ll pick you up at seven tomorrow night and we’ll go out to dinner. We’ll go to Firpo’s Restaurant and after that we’ll go to the Grand Hotel Bar. We’ll have a swell time. I promise you, Margot, we’ll have as good a time as anybody could have in Calcutta.”

Margot had been laughing and gay up till then. Now she changed. She stared at me for a moment, then she looked away. I felt like putting my arm around her, and I did. “You’re nice, Gen,” she said, “but you don’t understand. I think you’d really like to take me out to dinner, but you just don’t understand. I can’t do that. It would be a scandal. I’m not wanted in places like Firpo’s.”

All I could think of was that the men who supported Margot—who paid her fabulous sums for the brief comfort of her embraces—were not only welcome in those

very rooms that I had mentioned, they were the principal patrons of them. A social code that barred her from those rooms and welcomed her customers didn't make sense to me.

"There's no one in India who can tell me who to take out and who not to take out," I said. "I like you, I enjoy your company, and I'm asking you to have dinner with me tomorrow night. To hell with the stuffed shirts in Calcutta's high society!"

Margot laughed softly and I could feel a tremorous thrill run through her. "Thank you, Gen," she said. "I'd love it."

Margot gave me the address of her apartment in town and I said I would call for her at seven. As we walked up and down in front of the big white house, the smile never left her lips, and every little while she would laugh happily and squeeze my arm. "I'll spend the whole day getting ready—of course, I never get up before two or three in the afternoon," she said. "I'll wear a silver gown and my diamond necklace—oh, Gen, it's gorgeous! It must have cost poor old Colonel—oh, but I shouldn't mention his name! But it really must have cost the old goat ten thousand pounds. And I'll wear two red roses in my hair . . ."

"I don't care what you wear, baby," I said. "You'd look gorgeous in a gunny sack and hobnailed boots."

I meant it too, having got a couple of good glimpses of her when we passed under holes in the jungle-like

foliage with the moonlight touching her shining hair and sparkling, laughing green eyes.

In her silver gown, with the Colonel's diamond necklace almost touching the rise of her breast, and with two star sapphire earrings and a pair of bright red roses in her hair, Margot was really the goods. Her barefooted and lovely young Indian maid let me into the apartment, and after showing me into the sumptuous, red-carpeted drawing-room, silently withdrew. A moment or two later a door opened across from the white satin divan on which I was seated, and Margot appeared. I think I must have gasped, but whether it was sound or only facial expression Margot's eyebrows lifted, and for a moment she seemed alarmed.

"Margot, baby!" I exclaimed, jumping to my feet. "Good lord, you're gorgeous!"

She stood there in the white frame of the bedroom doorway for a moment, then she walked slowly across the room, her eyes looking deep into mine. When she got up close I knew there was a mistiness in those brown eyes that hadn't been there a moment before. She bit her upper lip as she put her hands out and laid them on my shoulders. She closed her eyes, rose on her toes and kissed me.

Margot was so gorgeous and she felt so soft and lovely in my arms that I almost forgot the Galahadian impulse that had started this adventure. It was some time before I could force myself to pull away, to smile down at her,

and to say, "Hold yourself down to a gallop, honey. The evening is young—and you're supposed to be on a vacation."

Margot took the cue instantly, and from then on, all through the months that I knew her and went out with her, we played that ridiculously romantic game. There were times, I have to admit, when I might have changed the standards a bit—nights when we would return from a show or from a ride in the country in her roadster and then sit in her dimly lighted living-room listening to the radio. But the game was fun the way we played it. She thought of herself as a lady and I conducted myself as a gentleman in her presence.

Riding downtown in the limousine I had hired that first night, Margot turned to me at one point and said, "I knew you would really keep our date. I kept telling myself that you wouldn't—that I was foolish to think that you would—but I didn't doubt it really, not in my heart."

"Why the hell wouldn't I?" I said.

"You don't know what you're letting yourself in for, darling," Margot murmured.

She was right about that, as it turned out, although the experience was one I wouldn't have missed for the world. Somehow, I had thought that any trouble we encountered would be with officious headwaiters or muscle-bound bouncers; I thought of trouble at a night club or dining salon in Calcutta in the terms of such affairs in New York or Chicago. But I was all wrong in that.

I had made a reservation for two at Firpo's. When the

Italian headwaiter met us at the door and I gave him my name, he didn't even bat an eye. He saw Margot and there is no question he knew who she was, but he led us to our table with all the dignity and courtesy he could have accorded the leading members of Calcutta's top social set. As a matter of fact, I rather suspect he enjoyed the situation himself. There was an audible gasp through the entire roomful of diners as we entered, and every eye in the room was upon us as we made our way to the table at the edge of the dance floor. As I lifted Margot's silver-brocade wrap from her shoulders and the full glory of her gown and jewels—and above all, her figure—was revealed, there was a silence in that room that was the most profound thing I've ever encountered.

I don't remember what we had for dinner, or whether I ate anything that I ordered. But I remember Margot and the ecstasy in her eyes as she sat across from me, aware of the narrowed eyes of the women and the worried eyes of many of the men. If she had taken my suggestion and nodded and smiled at all the men she knew in that room, there would have been a blood bath in Calcutta's 400 that would have taken a place in history. But Margot was satisfied just to sit there and make small talk and eat her dinner and wink at me now and then when a stray word reached us from another table. "That necklace, my dear! Isn't it simply gorgeous?—I mean, but such poor taste, so gawdy, you know! But it must have cost a fortune! Who could possibly have given it to her? Sir Humphrey, do you think? Or Colonel —?"

After dinner we danced, and Margot was the most graceful woman on the floor, as well as the most stunning. The looks of astonishment that I had been given by many of the men in the room had changed during dinner to looks of resentment. Now as we mingled with the dancers, laughing and talking and having a high old time all by ourselves as if no one else existed so far as we were concerned, some of the stuffed shirts became quite obviously envious. I saw three dignified old Englishmen and a British colonel sitting at a table together, nudging each other and chuckling as if they had something wonderfully clever up their sleeves. A few minutes later the colonel pushed his way through to us on the dance floor and tapped me on the shoulder.

"By your leave, sir," he said, bowing stiffly, "may I cut in?" He was looking at Margot then, ignoring me completely and smiling with all the old-world charm at his command. "Good evening, Margot," he said.

Margot raised her brows quite coolly and flicked the colonel with a glance. "Good evening," she said.

We had stopped dancing, of course, and now I turned to the big boor and said in a loud voice, "I don't believe I know you."

The colonel drew back, rigid with dignity, and Margot, smiling at me, said, "I'm sure you don't, Captain, and I can't introduce you because I've forgotten the colonel's name." She turned to the fellow and studied his reddening face. At least fifty people were near enough to hear every word we said. "I'm so sorry," she went on, "but one

meets so many British officers, you know—" She glanced around the room, taking in at least a dozen uniformed socialites with her laughing brown eyes.

The colonel's retreat was disorganized—a virtual rout. What he had intended as something of a joke and a bit of playboy daring and recklessness had backfired miserably, and muffled laughter and giggling swept over the room. He and his three companions stayed only long enough to pay their check, and if Margot lost the four of them as customers it didn't worry her at all. I think the other people in the room admired her performance.

Margot and I stayed at Firpo's until ten-thirty or eleven o'clock, then we decided it might be fun to go some place else. Originally the plan had been to go on to the Grand Hotel Bar after dinner, but when we stepped out into the bright lights of Chowringhee Road, the main thoroughfare of the city, and found a cool breeze blowing and the moon bright among the stars overhead, we decided to go for a walk. Across from us was the city's principal public park, taken over in part by the Royal Air Force for use as a landing field and airbase, but still providing many acres of smooth lawn and shade trees for public use. We strolled there for half an hour or so, observing and talking about the scores of people lounging on the benches or sprawling on the grass. Many of them were Mohammedans, and had undoubtedly remained in the park after sunset when they held their regular evening prayer meeting. Afterwards we wandered farther down Chowringhee, taking brief excursions into narrow little side streets

lined with merchants' carts and illuminated only by candlelight. At midnight we heard the bells of St. Anne's Cathedral toll the hour, and a little later we watched the crowd coming out of the great Metro Theater. And finally, because Margot said she was tired and happy and sleepy after this first polite evening in years, I called my limousine and drove her home.

I saw Margot frequently when I came to Calcutta after that, and we became good friends. There was always a strange fascination about visiting her. The luxury of her apartment was like something out of the Arabian Nights, with little brown-skinned servant girls tiptoeing around the rooms, their bare feet sinking deep in the furry pile of the Oriental rugs. Margot lived like a princess on the fortune she was fast accumulating, and the notoriety she had innocently won as the widow of the murdered British doctor she used with utmost cynicism to speed her climb to the very top of the most cynical profession in the world.

"Why don't you quit this thing?" I asked her once after she told me the fabulous amount of her wealth. "You have money enough to live on the rest of your life. Why don't you retire?"

Margot smiled and said, "Not yet, Gen. Not yet, but it won't be long now. I set a goal for myself when I started—when I opened my place on Karaya—and in another few months I'll have reached it. The only thing that might keep me here after that is the war. It would be pretty hard in times like these to set myself up in New York or London or Paris as a respectable lady of wealth.

MARGOT OF KARAYA ROAD

There would be too many questions asked now; but after the war it will be easy. I'll find some run-down nobleman and buy him—like a lap dog—and then I'll be Lady Something-or-other or maybe even a countess. I'd kind of like being a countess . . .”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

We Capture Three Live Leopard Cubs

WITH EVERY PASSING MONTH the air-transport traffic across the Himalayas made tremendous increases in volume. By April of 1943 the China National Airways Corporation had thirty-two planes in service on that route and the United States Army's Ferry Command operated another one hundred and twenty-five or thirty transports. The increased traffic brought a greater strain on the pilots, not only because of the particular climatic hazards of the monsoon season, with ice and snow above the mountains and lashing rain or impenetrable fog over the terminals, but also because of increased Jap activity. Bomber and fighter bases had been well established by the invaders by then, and Allied transports that risked the southern route at any time of day or night were almost bound to run a gauntlet of attacking Zeros that swept into the sky from a score of hidden fields in Upper Burma.

Flying the northern route meant spending at least three out of every five hours of the average trip under oxygen, and while those masks are great things and have saved many a man's life, they have one strange little quirk that finally licked me completely.

I didn't notice the subtle change coming over me, but Al Gingiss did. We got up from the breakfast table at the cottage near Dinjan one morning toward the end of April and I immediately grabbed up my cap and flying jacket. Petach and Skippy Lane and Robertson were lolling back in their chairs lighting their after-breakfast cigarettes. Gingiss and I were the only ones on our feet.

"Come on, you bums!" I said. "Let's get cuttin'!"

Robertson looked up, puzzled. "What the hell is the rush? You got a date somewhere?"

I reached over and ruffled his hair, laughing and horsing around like a six-year-old. I felt like a million, full of energy and drive—and, if I had analyzed myself, of nerves. "You're gettin' old, kid," I said. "All of you birds, you're gettin' soft. We have a job to do for dear old China and the Four Freedoms and all that sort of rot. Come on, let's get cuttin'!"

Robertson got up because it was easier not to argue, and Skippy and Petach reluctantly left the table, too. We all piled into the station wagon and started off to the field.

"You're getting ants, Gen," Skippy said as we drove along. "A bad case of ants. What's that babe doin' to you down there in Calcutta?"

"It's not Margot that's doing it," Gingiss said. "It's all

this damned oxygen we're using. The stuff does something to you. I feel just like Gen most of the time—itching to get up there and get that old mask on again.”

I started to deny that I felt that way, but I couldn't. I suddenly realized that what Gingiss said was absolutely true. It wasn't so much the flying that sent thrills through me any more, it was the light and utterly earthless feeling that came with breathing oxygen that made me so anxious to get back in the air.

The moment I saw the plane standing out there on the apron of the runway that morning I felt that strange yearning. I wanted to get at those controls, lift that baby way up there, pull on the old oxygen mask and begin to live. That's the way it had become. Recognizing the fact frightened me a little; I couldn't believe it was really that bad. I tried to argue myself out of it, prove to myself that the mask hadn't victimized me. I forced myself to think of taking the plane up and flying around for an hour or so right above the field, never getting higher than three or four thousand feet. There wasn't any thrill in that idea—not until I pictured climbing to twelve thousand and slipping on the mask and taking a deep breath of oxygen. Then I knew Gingiss was right.

The trip across that day wasn't difficult or exciting. It was a routine flight. We ran into snow an hour out of Dinjan, and before we had reached twenty thousand feet we had had a ten-minute battle with convectional currents that forced us to fly at a forty-five degree angle to clear the ranges. We had run into a driving rain

storm and climbed up and over it into a twenty-minute stretch of sleet. All those things were normal on the northern route—but there was one thing about that flight that wasn't normal at all. I felt as though I were no longer the master of myself or of my plane. The instant I put on my oxygen mask at twelve thousand feet and took a long deep breath I knew that I had lost a battle with an enemy I hadn't even known existed. I felt my entire body relax, the tension that had filled me back at the cottage was gone, I wasn't restless, I was completely at ease. I was an oxygen addict; I lived in contentment only when I had on that mask.

For a week I fought with myself over that mysterious addiction. I tried to limit the amount of the stuff I used. That only made it worse. Then fatigue would get to the point where I wasn't flying well, my mind would be slow and my reflexes sluggish. I would take the necessary amount then and try to be unmindful of the subtle pleasure it gave me. But it was a losing battle.

Gingiss talked to me about it. He was going through almost the same thing. "I don't know what effect this will have on me in the long run, Gen," he said, "but the damn thing has me scared. I feel wacky up there sometimes, as though I'd like to take a few nice big hauls on the mask and then to hell with everything. That's no way to feel when you're flying over these mountains."

"Maybe we ought to knock off for a while," I suggested. "Take a run down to Calcutta for a couple of weeks—"

"It's only two weeks since we were down there," Ging-

iss said, "and that's no relaxation anyway. A lot of playing around. Smoking and drinking and staying up all night. That sort of thing won't do any good."

And then coming back from Kunming one day I developed violent stomach cramps and had to turn the controls over to my co-pilot for almost an hour of the trip. Not until we were down to twelve thousand feet and I took off my mask did I find any relief; then, as we dropped lower, the cramps gradually disappeared and I took over the controls again. When we got into Dinjan I talked to Captain Woods about it, told him what had happened and how the oxygen had been affecting me lately. He nodded and said, "You're not the first one, Gen. So far as the oxygen is concerned you might be able to lick it by taking a rest for a while, but the cramps probably mean your prostate gland is being affected. I don't know whether it's the oxygen or the altitude that does that, but several boys have had to quit for the same reason."

One of the Army doctors at the base verified what Woods had said and told me that sterility might result if the prostate trouble continued. My agreement with C.N.A.C. had been to fly for them until June 15, which was still a month away, but I knew from the experience I had had coming back across the Hump that day that I was more of a hazard to them at that point than an asset. Gingiss agreed with me when we talked it over that night, and he decided to pull out, too. We wired Bond in Calcutta the next day, and five days later we flew our last freight for C.N.A.C.

The day after we wired Bond I met Tony Mercede in Kunming. He was upset at the thought of our leaving so soon. "Hell," he said, "I'm only going to be here another month. My contract was up a long time ago, but I agreed to stay on until summer—" He broke off abruptly and snapped his fingers. "Listen: how about another hunting trip before you go? I'll get hold of Vince in Calcutta tomorrow or the next day and make the arrangements, and we can spend a few days up in Tongsawa. Maybe we'll get us a leopard or a tiger or something. And you and Gingiss can hang around Calcutta for a week or two after that, and by then I'll be ready to go back to the States with you."

I agreed for both Gingiss and myself. Three days later Tony hopped out of an Army transport at Dinjan and announced that everything was set. Elephants and guides and all the paraphernalia for the safari would be ready for us at the Maharajah's lodge within two days. Vince sent a special message to Gingiss urging him not to shoot any more tigers that were tottering into the grave. "Try a young one this time, Al," Vince wrote. "It's more dangerous, of course, but it's much more sporting."

"That louse!" Gingiss cried. "Why, that tiger was ready to chew my damn head off! I shot him in self-defense!"

On the morning of the second day the station wagon from Cooch Behar swung up the driveway, stopped in front of the cottage and the three of us piled in for the ride to Vince's lodge.

That was an odd experience, that trip. It took only six

hours and was made entirely in comfortable conditions. The heat was considerable, but no greater than it had been for several weeks, and the humidity was no worse than normal; the car we rode in was a big and comfortable Buick station wagon, and Vince's butler had thoughtfully provided a basket of fruit and sandwiches and tea which the chauffeur stopped to serve us along the way. Even so, by the time we reached Cooch Behar, Gingiss and I were suffering from terrific headaches. I had been full of nervous energy when we left Dinjan, just as I had been every morning for the past several weeks. Before we were two hours on the road I was wishing to hell that I had stayed at the base, stayed on the job, and taken another flight across the Himalayas. I knew exactly why I felt that way, but knowing did not do any good. I wanted to get a lungful of oxygen. Going without it from breakfast to eleven o'clock in the morning was just like going without a cigarette until that hour would be to an inveterate cigarette smoker. I was irritable. I felt a kind of helpless anger. If that situation had gone on much longer, with the headache getting worse all the time, I would have been in a murderous frame of mind.

The burden was entirely on Tony during that trip, and about half an hour before we arrived at the lodge he got a bright idea. I think his choice must have been pretty slim: either he had to do something or bail out of that car before Gingiss and I tore him apart. We were equally unbalanced by then.

"What you bastards need is a drink," he said, breaking

in on an argument Al and I were having about nothing at all. "You're talkin' like a couple of lunatics. Here, drink this, Gen." He handed me a bottle of Scotch.

That was my second drink in two years—the first had been that day in England when I brought my first Airacobra down in a crash landing alongside a little village pub. I didn't want to take it at first, but when I looked at Tony I knew that I had to. He was always a level-headed lad, a little excitable on occasion, but never very far out of bounds. In addition to that he's a bruiser—two hundred and thirty pounds with shoulders as broad as a wrestler's, and hands like hams. And the way he was looking at me when he handed over that bottle wasn't conducive to argument.

"Go ahead, Gen, take a drink," he said. I did.

I passed the bottle to Gingiss. Al put it to his lips and took a long pull. Tony took it back then, looked at it for a minute as though he couldn't resist, but finally he did and put it away. "I should be a g—d— nursemaid!" he muttered. "You two bastards!"

The drinks did the trick. I had three big ones in that last half-hour of the trip and Gingiss had more than that. When we reached the lodge it took Tony and the chauffeur and a couple of native boys to haul Al and myself up the stairs and into the lodge. Tony was sweating like a dog, with big beads of perspiration running out of his beard by the time he dropped us on our beds, and we laughed uproariously at his string of oaths and curses as he turned from the room and slammed the door. Tony

had decided the trip was a bust before it was even well begun, but as far as Gingiss and I were concerned it was off to a marvelous start. We had found something to take the place of oxygen. The only pity was that it had to be The Great White Trader's favorite brand of Scotch.

We got up for supper, our headaches gone, feeling better than we had in weeks. It was the eighteenth of May; not once since the first of May had either of us missed a day of flying. Sometimes we would fly one trip, more often a double haul, over in the morning and back at night; and always with two to three hours under oxygen. This was the first day in almost three weeks that we had had twenty-four hours of natural breathing.

The next morning we woke up feeling swell. We told the Number One Boy to drag out the stuff, we were ready for the hunt. Within an hour the elephants were saddled and waiting, the whole retinue was in order, and off we went.

As a vacation and a complete change from flying transports over the Hump, that hunting expedition turned out to be just the thing; but as a game-bagging proposition, it was pretty much a bust. It was until the last day, that is. Until then we hadn't seen a single tiger or leopard, and the only shooting we had done was at wild hogs. Gingiss bagged three of them in one day and Tony and I brought down four between us on another day, but without much certainty as to whose bullets did the dirty work. The only certainty was that the hogs were dead—and with enough lead in their carcasses to sink a small ship. Then on the

sixth day of the hunt—which wasn't intended to be the last, but was—we had the thrill of our lives.

Tony was on the leading elephant, Gingiss rode the second and I followed up the rear as we moved slowly along the jungle trail. Only two of the porters were needed now to carry the diminished supplies; the others, carrying their spears and bows ready for instant use, moved silently through the tangled undergrowth in a fan formation that spread fifty yards to either side of the elephants. At times the boys couldn't be seen, their shining brown bodies, naked except for loin cloths, blending almost perfectly with the brownish-green of the jungle. The only noises would be the crunching of twigs and small shrubs under the elephants' hoofs and the chattering of monkeys in the trees. Now and then there would be a flurry of wings and the startled note of a bird routed from its nest; again a nerveless parrot would sit on a low branch, composed and indifferent as we approached and then, just as we drew alongside, let out a screech that would startle us from our seats.

We were passing through a kind of glen formed by lumpy, moss-covered rocks and overhanging trees that sprang up behind them, when I heard the soft crackling of twigs under the foot of some habitant of the jungle. It seemed to come from very near the trail and a little off to the left. I decided to investigate. Without making the mistake Gingiss had made when he spotted his over-age tiger, I said absolutely nothing, and simply swung my feet out of the chair and slid off the elephant's back. I

landed upright in the tall grass with surprisingly little noise and took about two short steps forward. Crouching low in that position for at least three or four minutes, I decided it must have been my imagination and was just about to throw the rifle over my shoulder when my Number One Boy to my left let out a scream, "Sahib! Sahib!"

I flinched and pulled my gun around at the same time—just to see the boy's spear flash through the air toward a point a little above and behind me. I shot a glance toward the low branches of the heavy jungle oak, and there she was—one hundred and thirty pounds of leopard, claws unsheathed and ready to spring, less than six feet away, with nothing between us but the clearest kind of space—when I fired. She was in the air when the bullet struck; I could see it jerk her head back. Almost at the same time there was a sharp crack from Tony's gun. He had crept up behind me. And then the huge beast crashed at my feet—lifeless.

The leopard was thoroughly dead with just those two bullets of Tony's and mine. The native boy's spear had missed its mark. My bullet had got her directly in the heart, right through the center of the chest, and Tony's had entered the lower right side of her neck and emerged from the upper left. In her pelt, which I proudly display on my living-room floor, is the only indication that she didn't die a natural death—that one little patched spot where Tony's bullet tore the fur on her neck. The hole in her chest and the one on the under side of her neck

don't show because they were in line with the knife when the pelt was removed.

Gingiss, Tony and I were examining the leopard when I heard, directly behind me, a mewling sound like that of a small kitten, and yet it had had a slight growl. I grabbed my gun, cocking it at the same time, ready for action. The native boys had already raised their spears, poised for the kill—but nothing happened. We waited that way for fully a couple of minutes when the sound was repeated. This time it was louder and I could tell it came from an animal; however, I forged steadily forward and under the thick vinelike growth for about five or six yards, half on my stomach, half on my hands and knees. I was about to give it up as a false alarm when I noticed just ahead of me a cavelike opening. I pushed aside the branches and foliage and there in a pocket of a huge gray rock sprawled three baby leopards, sound asleep.

They made a beautiful picture, their little kitten heads lying snugly against each other's bellies, all curled around in a pattern of bright yellow and black, their coats silky soft and glimmery in the jungle's filtered rays of light. They were within six feet of where I stood, and my first feeling was one of bitter disappointment: I didn't have my camera. I was cursing softly to myself when I realized I was out hunting leopards—that's why I was here in the jungle—and practically within my very grasp were three of the finest prizes a man could possibly find; evidently the cubs of the mother I had just killed in self-defense. . . .

The importance of their capture died within me when I began to realize I had unwittingly cut off their food supply and very existence by killing the mother. Instead, I found myself feeling a keen sense of responsibility for the bringing up of the cubs. I had my rifle in my hand but, knowing I wouldn't need it for these kittens, I laid it down and signaled for Gingiss and Tony to come near. I figured we would each of us creep up very quietly and grab one of them. The native boys knew something was up by this time and they circled back to see what it was. Just as they arrived I sprang into the cave and caught one of the cubs in my hands. The other two let out yips and tried to scramble out of reach, but Gingiss and Tony had followed my example, and in a matter of a few seconds we were standing in a group, panting and laughing, each of us with a startled and shivering baby leopard in our arms.

Bringing 'em back alive calls for different kind of equipment than we had. We called off the hunt and told our guide to get us back to the lodge in the shortest and quickest possible way. It was about eleven in the morning, and for two hours we went crashing through the jungle trails as if we had been sent for, the boys flanking us a few yards on each side for protection, and the elephants pounding along in an endless jog that really made holding to the saddle a matter of definite skill. In two hours we probably covered fifteen miles, but neither the elephants nor the boys seemed the least worn-out from the exertion. After a hurried lunch we started off again.

By sundown our guide had brought us out of the jungle onto a fairly good dirt road that paralleled the Brahmaputra River on its meandering course to within a few miles of Vince's lodge.

All the way back Gingiss and Tony and I carried our baby leopards in our laps, and by the time we climbed down out of our saddles along about midnight we needed clean, dry clothes worse than we had ever needed them before. In the days to come we were to learn that the leopard kittens were a feeding problem, but at no time in their lives, right from that first day, did they ever have any trouble with elimination.

"Now I know how the new C. O. at Kunming felt the other day when the Japs came over," Tony laughed. "He'd been making a big show of being brave and hard-boiled, but when those bombers came over he beat the fastest buck private into the slit trench. He dove in, right flat on his big belly. And when the raid was over he climbed out madder than hell. All the way back to the field office he was cussing to himself and wiping his face and brushing at his uniform. And when he stepped into the office he glared at the first guy he saw and yelled, 'Lieutenant! In the future please see that these natives don't use our trenches for latrines!'"

The cats were as tired as their captors by the time we reached the lodge. After they each had a supper of milk—which we dribbled into their tiny mouths from the tip of a spoon—they were perfectly content to curl up again with their ferocious little heads on each other's bellies

and go sound asleep on a thick Oriental rug, which we took from the living-room for that purpose and put in the butler's quarters. With them safely stowed away, Gingiss and Tony and I sat down to our own midnight snack. Until the small hours of the morning, we sat talking about what we were going to do with our charges. Much earlier, as we jogged down the river road on our elephants, we had decided on names for the cats. Gingiss, insisting that there was a resemblance, had named his "Margot." And since Tony, whenever he was feeling his drinks, had a tendency to go into a certain very corny dance routine, it was only natural that he would call his "Suzy Q." Another reason for those selections, of course, was that theirs were lady cats. Mine was a male, and in addition to being the more active of the three he had a habit of licking out with his tongue and making a hissing noise whenever either of the others got too close to him. I called him "Spitfire."

Tony and Suzy Q flew back to Kunming from Dinjan while Gingiss and I—and our cats—went down to Calcutta to arrange for our return to America. I knew it would be good to see the States again, to visit with my family and friends back home. But there was a feeling of going out of action; of leaving important things behind—things that had to be done by someone, things that perhaps I should be staying on to do. I've heard soldiers talk that way when they are given a medical discharge. "Hell, the war isn't over yet, and I can still fight. What if I do limp a little bit? I can still carry a gun, can't I?"

Sure, and I could still fly an airplane and the C.N.A.C. needed all the pilots it could get to fly its transports across the Himalayas. But it was like that old saw: "The best soldier is a live soldier." And the best pilot is a live one, too. If I stayed on in India drinking oxygen with the C.N.A.C. I couldn't possibly have remained alive for more than a few months—possibly even days. Wacky pilots don't last long anywhere, and on the trans-Himalaya run only the very best pilots survive. I wasn't in that category there any more, and the best thing I could do for myself and my crews and the C.N.A.C. was to clear out before that one inevitable overdose of oxygen destroyed one of their invaluable planes and took the lives of a promising young co-pilot and an expert radio operator, as well as my own.

It was good-by to a wonderful bunch of boys—courageous, hard-working lads who liked their jobs and the thrills they entailed just as much as I did; who liked to laugh and drink and play cards; who liked carousing and song and women—and who day after day risked their lives on the toughest airline route in the world not because they had to but because they wanted to. Pat O'Brien, the movie star, made a remark after spending two months in that theater of war entertaining the boys, "There's only one thing tougher than the toughest flying route in the world . . . and that is the boys that fly it!" Not because there was glory in it or medals to be won, but simply because there was a job to do—and they knew that they were the boys to do it.

It was good-by to the most colorful country in all the world, India, with its jungles and deserts and snow-capped mountains; its brown-skinned natives and bamboo villages; its sacred cows and chattering monkeys and screaming jackals. It was good-by to the Maharajah of Cooch Behar, our frequent host and eternal good friend; good-by to Calcutta, that fabulous city of narrow streets thronged with animals and people, of marble shrines and great domed churches, of modern "Westernness" in some respects and utmost Eastern antiquity in others. And it was good-by to Margot, the far-famed prostitute who deliberately designed her life to be a lasting rebuke to the "civilized" society whose meanness and cruelty had robbed her of the right to live decently.

Gingiss and I were afraid that it was going to be good-by to Tony Mercede, too, because during the first week of waiting for word from him in Calcutta we heard nothing. Finally we went ahead with our own plans, arranging transportation to Karachi and Bombay and by liner across the Arabian Sea to Durban, South Africa. From there we would take the train to Cape Town, where we hoped to get passage on a convoy or troopship returning to the States. Two days before we were to leave by plane for Karachi we received word from Tony that he would join us in Calcutta on the fifteenth. Al Privensal brought the message, having arranged to spend a few days with us in the city before we left, and we sent word to Tony through the pilot who had brought Pri down that we

WE CAPTURE LEOPARD CUBS

would meet him in Karachi instead. Then Gingiss and Pri and I started making the rounds of the bars and night clubs and theaters. Two days later we shook hands at the airport, and Gingiss and I and our leopard kittens began the long journey home.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Bring 'em Back Alive

THE TERMINAL BUILDING at the Karachi Airdrome has a large passengers' waiting-room, a high-ceilinged, marble-walled hall, and as Gingiss and I left the British Overseas Airways plane the next afternoon and walked through a rather large crowd gathered in there, I heard a voice that was strangely familiar. I stopped and looked around. About ten feet from where I stood a group of young Air Corps officers were gathered around a little bit of a fellow in a major's uniform. The little major was giving them some rapid-fire, last-minute instructions, and it was his voice that I had heard.

"Louie Dell!" I yelled. "Why, you old so-and-so! What the hell are you doing over here?"

Louie swung around, his dignity as a major in the

Army Air Corps very much shattered. The younger men who had been devouring his words so solemnly turned to gape at the audacious stranger. Then Louie burst out of the group with a shout as he recognized me, and we jumped around laughing and pounding each other on the back until we were almost exhausted.

Louie didn't have time to tell me much about himself right then—he still had to wind up his speech to the boys he was seeing off to Calcutta on their way to the Army airbase at Dinjan. But we arranged to meet later in the afternoon, and during the next three days, while Al and I waited for Tony to join us, we had some swell times with Louie.

When I left California to sign up with the A.T.A. in New York, Louie had come to the airport to see me off and he had given me his Caterpillar Club pin as a kind of good-luck charm. He and I had worked together in the production engineering department at Lockheed for over a year and had become good friends. He was on the envious side when he thought of staying on there while I went overseas. But he had a reserve commission in the Air Corps and knew he would be called up as soon as the United States got into the war, so he felt his best bet was to stick around until then. I gave him back his pin that first night in Karachi, and he admitted he was glad to have it again. "I've needed lots of luck since I got back in the service," he said. "And I'll need all I can get for what's ahead of me now. I trained with the Air Corps for several months after Pearl Harbor, and then I spent

a year in the South Pacific—got my majority at Guadalcanal. Now I'm on my way to somewhere in China."

His first emergency parachute jump—the one that had earned him the Caterpillar pin—hadn't been his last, and in the action he looked forward to when our air forces in China started battering the mainland of Japan, he figured he would hit the silk many more times.

We ran into our first difficulties with the cats in Karachi. If we had known then what a succession of problems were to follow I think we would have either taken up residence in India or turned the little devils back into the jungle. "So sorry, Sahib," the hotel clerk said when he saw Spitfire and Margot poke their heads out of the basket and blink up at him there in the lobby. "Pups are not allowed in the hotel. Government regulations."

"These aren't pups," I said. "They're kittens, and they won't cause any trouble. We'll keep them right in our room. They're the quietest and cleanest little fellows you ever saw. They'll be all right—"

"I cannot help it, Sahib. They cannot be kept in the hotel."

Gingiss picked up the basket and said, "Go ahead and sign for a room, Gen. I'll take the cats to a veterinary and board them until we leave."

That was an easy solution. There was a small veterinary shop a couple of blocks from the hotel, and the old Englishman who operated it was familiar with baby leopards. He told us about giving them barley water with their milk as a means of helping digestion; he also gave them

their first taste of meat, and although they didn't go for it at first, by the time we left for Bombay three days later it was their favorite food.

Tony Mercede and Suzy Q arrived in Karachi a day ahead of his original schedule, so we immediately arranged for train transportation to Bombay. The trip to Bombay is about seven hundred miles through desert country, and the passenger accommodations are more or less an afterthought, consisting of one or two sleeping cars casually added to a slow, noisy line of freight cars. Even so, the compartments were all well filled and it cost us an extra five rupees to get the conductor to assure us a compartment to ourselves. This was vitally important, of course, because of the cats.

As we showed our tickets before climbing aboard, the uniformed inspector looked suspiciously at the big basket I was carrying. "What's in there?" he asked snappishly. "No pups allowed on the train, you know."

"Pups?" I repeated, laughing as if that were a very funny joke. "What would I be doing with pups? This is just our laundry—soiled clothes, you know." I took hold of the shirttail that I had left showing from under the newly acquired cover for the basket. "Best not to get the dirty things mixed up with the clean!" I explained airily—and hustled on ahead of Gingiss and Tony. One of the little devils tucked in there under the dirty shirts was starting to whine. . . .

The train ride was as hard on the cats as it was on us. When we got settled in the compartment, we drew the

shades and kept them that way until the train was well out of the station. Until it was actually in motion the three of us kept up a loud conversation to drown out the growing complaints of the leopards. Gingiss even burst into song at one point. I didn't think very well of Tony's line of talk, which was a blistering denunciation of the train officials and the stupid porters, but later on it proved to have been a good idea. Before we reached Bombay we had refused five times to allow anyone, even the conductor, to enter our compartment. When, on the fifth occasion, Tony opened the door just wide enough to show his hand gripping the .45 automatic at his side, there was a startled exclamation from the conductor and a feverish explanation from the porter. "I told you, bara sahib! They crazy! They hate you, they hate me—they hate whole damn train!" Tony closed the door before he burst out laughing, and that was the last time we were bothered until we arrived in Bombay.

Once during the night the train stopped on a siding some distance out of the next village. Gingiss and I stepped outside for a few minutes, leaving Tony to guard the cats. The heat and the sand blowing into the compartment had been bad enough all day, but the increasingly foul smell of the cats was making the night really wretched. Standing out there breathing in clean air was a treat. Gingiss thought it would be a good idea to bring the cats out and air them and their basket. It would be fairly safe there in the darkness and a definite improvement on our living conditions. We opened the compart-

ment door, rousing Tony, who had, in spite of the stench, managed to fall asleep.

Gingiss explained his plan—that he and I stand opposite the ends of the coach to whistle a warning in case anyone came near, while Tony held the cats on their leashes near the compartment, ready to chuck them back inside if necessary. Tony didn't like the idea at first, but when he got a breath of fresh air he changed his mind, and we stood around for almost fifteen minutes before the train started off again.

As far as we could figure it out later, that must have been when the cats were discovered. We hadn't seen a train attendant anywhere until the engineer, far up ahead of the line of freight cars, reached out and signaled with a flashlight. The conductor leaned out of the end of the last coach and signaled back. The three of us and the cats promptly piled back into our compartment, convinced that we had got by with the airing very nicely, and the train pulled away.

In the morning, about an hour before we were due in Bombay, the smell was almost as bad as it had been before the airing, and I knew that we had no chance of fooling the inspectors who would be waiting to inspect everyone's baggage at the depot. One whiff of that compartment would be all they would need.

"To hell with the sand," I said. "We've got to open these windows and get this place aired out."

We did, and the sand was terrible, blowing in a steady, oven-hot blast through the open window, littering the

cats and ourselves with thick layers of dust. Even then the smell didn't noticeably decrease.

Finally we got a better idea. We had noticed that the train always slowed down to a bare crawl as it approached a station, so Gingiss was elected to jump off the train with the cats as soon as we got to the outskirts of town. We emptied the clothes out of two canvas duffle bags, cut holes in their sides, and put the cats into them; Spitfire in one and the two females in the other. Then we opened the compartment door and tossed the basket—fetid smells and all—out on the sand. When the train slowed down to about five miles an hour a few minutes after we entered the city, Gingiss said, "If I'm not at the Delamar Hotel in half an hour you'll find me in the clink." Then he took the two bags in one hand, swung himself to the ground with the other and was gone.

The minute the train stopped there was a pounding on our compartment door. Tony turned the handle and two burly Indians wearing baggage inspector's uniforms barged in. "You got some pups in here!" one of them shouted. "We got a wire. Where they at?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said. "You can see for yourself that there aren't any pups in here."

"You got them in a basket," the man said angrily, his flinty brown eyes scanning the little room. His companion was down on the floor peering under the seats, and now he got to his feet and glared at us.

"They must be here!" this second fellow said. "They got to be here. We got a wire!"

Tony growled and his big ham of a hand pushed me to one side as he moved forward, shoulders hunched menacingly. "Get out of here, you fools," he said. "The wire was mistaken. You can see that for yourself. Now beat it."

The two men looked at each other in bewilderment. They glanced around the compartment again, but there was no sign of pups or basket. At last they shrugged, mumbled their apologies, and withdrew. Tony and I, with a show of great indignation, summoned a porter to handle our bags and stalked from the train.

Gingiss was waiting for us in front of the Delamar Hotel. He waited outside until we had signed up for rooms. When he saw us head for the elevator he came in and briskly walked across the lobby to join us. All the way up in the elevator he complained in a loud voice about the taxicab situation in Bombay, continuing his lusty lament until all our baggage had been brought to the rooms and the porters were paid off and the doors closed. Then he set down the canvas bags and dropped into a chair, exhausted. In the welcome silence we could then hear the protesting whines of the cats.

We were in Bombay three days, and on the second day, after just about losing our minds trying to keep anyone from knowing we had the leopards in the hotel, I approached the manager, a middle-aged woman who had been very friendly to us, and confessed all. It was a long chance to take, but we were desperate; we had to get someone to take over the job of feeding and watching

the cats and cleaning up the room. The place smelled something awful. Even parking them on the little balcony outside the window, with sheeting draped around the railing for concealment, hadn't helped very much.

Mrs. Johnson gasped. "Real live leopards?" she exclaimed. "You have them upstairs right now? Why—how exciting!" She grabbed my arm and pulled me to the elevators. "Why didn't you tell me before? I can hardly wait to see them!"

That was a break. And when she saw the three little beggars playing around together, nipping at each other and rolling around on the floor, she was even more delighted. She called one of her porters and had us explain to him how to care for them. We demonstrated the feeding technique, using baby bottles with nipples which we had bought in Karachi, and we showed Mrs. Johnson how to mix the formula—six spoonful of barley water to eight ounces of milk. She insisted on taking care of that end of the job herself, and with the porter being as fond of the cats and as attentive to them as she, Tony and Gingiss and I were enabled to get around a little and see the sights of that colorful seaport city.

Bombay is several hundred miles closer to the equator than Calcutta and consequently much hotter, but it seemed to us that the heat was much less oppressive, which was no doubt due to the lower humidity. Calcutta, being more inland with access to the Bay of Bengal only through a long channel, surrounded by the many branches of the Ganges, was always steaming hot at mid-

day. Bombay, facing west across the Arabian Sea, was cooled by the sea breezes; even in the hottest part of the day there was a freshness to the air that was somehow reflected in the cleanliness and well-ordered appearance of the entire city. Because it faces Europe and is the first port of call for most ships coming East through the Suez Canal, it is a city of great wealth. The buildings in the European quarter are quite modern and beautiful, and even in the poorer native section there are few signs of slum conditions or extreme poverty.

We had arranged for transportation to Durban on the east coast of South Africa aboard the British passenger ship *Strathmore*, and during our prowlings around town on the second and third days of our stay in Bombay we gave considerable thought to how we were going to get the cats aboard without letting the ship's crew know anything about it. The best bet finally seemed to be to put them back in the two canvas bags, and that is what we did. I took one bag, with Spitfire in it, and Tony took the other containing Margot and Suzy Q. Gingiss said it was up to us to get them out of Bombay; he had gotten them in. We stalled around until the last minute before the ship sailed and, in the excitement of our late arrival, together with the fact that we were still wearing our service uniforms, the port authorities gave us no trouble at all. One of the stewards at the head of the gangplank tried to take my canvas bag and carry it for me, but decided it probably contained important dispatches or something when I snatched it out of his grasp.

It's a ten-day voyage from Bombay to Durban—four thousand miles of mild, blue Indian Ocean—and after two days sailing under the grim conditions imposed on us by the leopards, Gingiss and Tony and I were just about ready to slit each other's throats or murder the cats or both. One of us was always in the stateroom, another of us was always filching extra towels from the general toilet rooms to use—quite inadequately—as diapers for the pets. These had to be washed out and dried and used again for the same foul-smelling purpose. Asking the steward to bring a pitcher of lukewarm milk to the room hadn't seemed to disturb the fellow the first time—"One of my friends is a little uneasy on the water," Gingiss had explained. But when the same request was made again two hours later by me, and two hours after that by Tony (because we were taking shifts going on deck for a bit of freedom and some fresh air), the steward began to show a bit of interest as well as annoyance.

Finally, toward evening of the second day, I intercepted the Captain as he was heading for his cabin and said, "Say, Captain, how'd you like to see something? I know it's against the rules—but d'you know what I have in my stateroom?"

"No, sir," the Captain said stiffly, "I have no idea what you have in your stateroom."

"Well, sir," I said, "you'll certainly get a kick out of this! Wait here a minute and I'll bring it out and show you." I left him standing there and beat it down the corridor to our room. Tony was on duty, and I dashed in

and slipped the leash on Spitfire. He was the best-looking and the most playful of the three, and everything seemed to depend at that moment on the impression he made on the captain. I told Tony what I had done. He gasped.

"My lord, Gen! Do you want to get us thrown in the brig? This is serious business."

"It's damned serious," I replied. "Especially living in the same room with the little beggars. Just let me handle it. He won't have the heart to throw 'em overboard, and he'll have to get 'em out of the passengers' quarters. Just watch; he'll have a place set up for them in the steerage . . ."

As I led Spitfire out into the corridor I waited for the Captain's reaction. For no good reason I had an idea he would take an immediate liking to Spitfire. The little fellow really was cute, and padding softly along at my side as he was, his little head darting from side to side and his black and yellow coat glistening over his fat little body, it didn't seem possible that anyone could not instantly take to him.

"What in the hell is this?" boomed the Captain. His face turned purple and his gray mustache bristled as he drew himself to his full height, glaring at me in outraged dignity.

"Just a leopard, Captain," I said. "Cute little fellow—just a kitten. Captured him myself in the jungle. Taking him home—back to the States, you know—"

"Not on my ship!" the Captain bellowed. "There are

laws to be observed—British laws—and they're quite explicit. You smuggled that pup aboard this ship, and by God, I'll have it thrown overboard!"

Spitfire was startled by the Captain's shouting, but only for a moment. He pulled forward, straining on the leash, and then he was sniffing at the Captain's shoes. The Captain was breathing hard, his blood pressure mounting. Suddenly he drew back his right foot as if to kick Spitfire. Before the foot was half raised the kitten was crouched, his baby teeth bared and his body poised for attack—and the only sound in the corridor was that angry little growl and spitting sound that he made when he was mad.

The cat was harmless, of course. He was too young to inflict serious damage on anyone, and the Captain's heavy foot could easily have killed him. But he didn't look harmless, and the Captain, instead of following through with the kick, stepped quickly back a pace and planted both feet solidly on the carpet. Then he stared at the little spotted demon, and gradually a grin broke through his startled countenance. "Spunky little devil, hain't 'e?" he said.

I laughed. "He couldn't hurt a fly. Just likes to act tough. . . . Look now, just put out your hand, real slowly. He'll come over to be petted."

Cautiously the Captain bent down a little and stretched out a hand. Spitfire studied it warily a moment, then he got up and trotted forward. The Captain touched the back of his head, twiddled his ears, stroked his back.

They were friends in two minutes.

There was a trying moment a couple of hours later when Gingiss and Tony and I trotted out all three of the leopards for the Captain's inspection, but after a certain amount of protest and sputtering he calmed down and agreed to expand the accommodations then being prepared for Spitfire in the steerage. There was only one disturbing note in the entire affair then, and that was that Gingiss' Margot was acting strangely. She preferred lying down to standing and she didn't want to play with the other cats or even to be petted by Al. She hadn't eaten well for twelve hours or more and the way she curled up when she was lying down suggested stomach pains. The reason, we knew, was that she wasn't getting barley water with her milk. In the excitement of getting the cats on the boat at Bombay we had forgotten to lay in a supply of that essential digestion aid, and there was none of it available on the boat. When the captain noticed Margot's lethargy he summoned the ship's doctor. For the next two days, under his treatment—which consisted of adding a couple of drops of brandy to the milk—she showed some improvement. And then one night at 2:30 A.M. the steward who was caring for the cats in the steerage rapped at our door and told us that Margot was very ill. We all rushed below decks. We found the doctor already in attendance, but there was nothing anyone could do. Half an hour later the little leopard let out a last feeble whine and died. She was buried at sea the next day.

We knew that the customs inspection at Durban,

Union of South Africa, was going to be tough, so before we docked Gingiss and Tony and I worked out a program. We would bring the two remaining cats, Suzy Q and Spitfire, up to our stateroom, locking them in there when we left the ship. After we had gone through the customs, one of us would remember leaving a laundry bag on board and he would hustle back to get it. Meanwhile we would have been very liberal with tips for the customs men, and when the one who had gone back for the laundry would reappear we would be such good friends with the inspectors and in such a very great hurry to be on our way that they wouldn't even glance at the bag. In it, of course, would be the two cats, along with a couple of dirty shirts.

The plan worked perfectly, but it was vastly improved through a strange circumstance. On board the boat with us coming down from Bombay had been a number of British soldiers, presumably on their way back to England. We hadn't seen much of them or found time to talk to them during the trip because there were also several British nurses aboard whom we found far more interesting. But as we were going through the customs one of these soldiers—and not a very subtle clod at best—stepped up to me and said, "I say, old fellow, what about the cats? I don't see them—"

"Quiet, bud, quiet!" I hissed. Then, as I noticed the huge bulky trench coat he was wearing, I got a brilliant idea. His pal standing with him was wearing the same kind of coat—and neither of them were having any

trouble with the customs inspection at all. I grabbed his arm and said, "I'm in a jam, pal, but you can get me out of it. You and your buddy slip back on the boat for a minute and I'll follow you. Go ahead—it'll be worth a pound note apiece."

A pound apiece looked pretty good to the two lads and they promptly went back up the gangplank. Gingiss and Tony, meanwhile, had been passing around Chinese dollar bills to the customs men as souvenirs as well as a liberal amount of good British money. "Some extra cigarettes in there," they said quietly, pointing to their bags. "I'd like to get 'em through if you could be a good scout—"

They were all good scouts at Durban, and as they were furtively pocketing their ill-gotten gains I suddenly remembered my laundry. "Say, where the hell is that laundry bag of mine?" I demanded, turning to Gingiss. "Didn't you bring it with you?"

"No. Thought you had it," Gingiss said.

"I knew you'd forget something," Tony said, sighing heavily. That part of the act was corny, but it worked. Tony looked more like a wrestler or a prize fighter than a chap who would heave his shoulders and sigh.

"Well, it must be in the stateroom," I said. "I've got to go back for it."

"Damn it all, hurry up and get it," Gingiss snapped. "We've got a train to catch."

I dashed for the gangplank and the customs men signaled the guard to let me through. On deck I met the two soldiers and we went down to the stateroom. Suzy Q

and Spitfire were tumbling around in the middle of the floor, wholly indifferent to the trouble they were causing. They seemed to regard it as merely another part of the game when I picked them up, helping the soldiers tuck them into the pockets of their bulky trench coats. At the same time pound notes went into their other pockets, and we were a jubilant little group as we rushed back down onto the dock, me with my laundry bag ready for inspection, and the two soldiers, no doubt plotting a historic binge with their earnings, looking not much bulkier than usual with the leopards bulging inside their coats. When we were a safe distance from the customs house, we took the cats from the soldiers, hailed a cab, and with the contraband pets again stuffed into the canvas bag we rehearsed our plans for getting them into the hotel. On the way we stopped at an apothecary shop to get a supply of barley water to ward off the indigestion that had killed Margot. Suzy Q was already showing signs of sickness. Before we reached Cape Town, three days after our arrival at Durban, she was unable to hold food in her stomach. The entire second night on the train we kept her wrapped in a blanket snuggled close against the heating coils in our compartment, but despite that she shivered and whined the whole time.

On the train we met an American soldier named Stanley who was stationed at Cape Town. When we arrived there he offered to let us keep the cats in the yard back of his house. We accepted the offer and as soon as we got to his place we called a veterinary; but by then

it was too late. Suzy Q died within an hour. We buried her there in Stanley's backyard.

Gingiss and Tony were broken hearted about the loss of their cats. Tony actually cried when the veterinary was unable to bring Suzy Q around, and it was a touching thing to see real tears in the eyes of that bearded, two-hundred-and-fifty-pound giant. A ruthless fighter, for two heroic years a nerveless, unflinching leader of construction gangs and dynamite crews, a man who had shot it out in scores of Jap guerrilla attacks and personally settled accounts with some eight Chinese renegade bandits in their sneaking night raids on Burma Road convoys—and he cried like a baby when his leopard kitten died.

I was alarmed for Spitfire now, of course. Since we were going to be in Cape Town for several days, I took him out to the Cape Town zoo to see what the experts there would be able to recommend. A Mr. and Mrs. Hooker were in charge and my story of how the other cats had died indicated, they said, that death in both cases had been due to starvation. Without the barley water the cats hadn't been able to digest the food we had given them; they might just as well have eaten nothing at all in the absence of the barley water to make it digestible. They marveled that Spitfire still seemed so well, but it was evident at a glance that he was considerably underweight.

The Hookers kept him for a week. I bought another basket in Cape Town—a big round one, such as fruit and

jellies and candy are sometimes packed in at Christmas time—and during Spitfire's stay at the zoo he used the basket as his bed. Mrs. Hooker put a straw lining in it and made him an ostrich-feather bat to play with. He began to put on weight almost from the first day on a diet of limewater and milk and, toward the end of his stay, even ate a little meat on occasion. He played with the other animals in the zoo, especially a tiny monkey which used to cling to his back and scream with delight as Spitfire raced around the enclosure and went through all sorts of maneuvers to unseat his rider.

Smuggling our one remaining pet aboard the Army transport on which we returned to the States was much easier than I had thought it would be. We simply stuck him in his basket, tossed a couple of shirts over him and clamped the cover down tight, leaving a couple of inches of shirttail exposed at one point. When the customs inspector asked what I had in the basket I gave the shirt a tug and said, "Dirty clothes, that's all." And then, in explanation of the unusual container, "They get mildewed in those damn canvas bags!"

The commanding officer on board the transport was Captain George Hilcrest of Akron, Ohio. He was a young fellow, about thirty-two or three, and we got along with him finely until the third day out, when I casually mentioned that I had a baby leopard down in the stateroom. "You can't do that!" he exclaimed. And then he laughed. "That's not true, is it? You've done it. But there is one very strict regulation: If you don't have a health certifi-

cate we'll have to get rid of it. That's a fact. I have no alternative."

"Oh, but I have a health certificate," I said. "The veterinary in—ah, Karachi—made one out for me. A very nice one, too. I'll go down and get it. You wait here."

Hilcrest was good enough to wait and it took me only a few minutes to go down to the room and write out a very high-sounding testament to Spitfire's excellent health. I didn't remember the Karachi veterinary's name, so I appended a scrawling signature that I couldn't even read myself. Hilcrest read it all very carefully, grinning as he handed it back. "I've never seen one quite like that before," he said. "Usually they are on a fancy printed form and notarized and all that sort of thing. I—ah—suppose you were in quite a hurry and this veterinary, whatever his name is—I can't make it out—was fresh out of blank certificates?"

"Yes," I said, "that's just about the size of it."

"Um-hmmm," said Hilcrest, and he turned and walked away.

I had an uneasy moment coming through the customs at New York when we landed there on the sixteenth of August. The inspector was going through my stuff with great thoroughness and I was keeping the basket containing Spitfire and some dirty shirts until the very last. It didn't really matter too much at that point, anyway, because if he was discovered it would probably only mean having him kept in quarantine for a few weeks to make sure he wasn't diseased. But in the last suitcase the

inspector opened before coming to the basket he came across the baby bottle and nipple. I had forgotten about customs when I tossed them into the bag, otherwise I would have thrown them overboard before we docked.

"What the devil is this?" the inspector demanded.

I sighed heavily and hung my head, and in a suitably trembling voice I said, "I was married in China, Inspector. We had a—a baby boy—they didn't pull through—I lost them both—my wife and—and my son." I braced my shoulders and straightened bravely under my tragic burden. "I have nothing else to remember them by—except that little bottle and nipple."

By that time the inspector was feeling like a heel. He closed the suitcase quickly. He glanced at the basket on my arm and saw the shirttail protruding. "That your laundry?" he asked tenderly.

I nodded and moved sadly on my way. Gingiss and Tony had been waiting for me when I started my story, but now they were gone. I found them on the street slowly recovering from a fit of laughter that would have ruined my act had they not got outside in time.

Shortly after our arrival in Calcutta on the way back home I had made inquiry about shipping a large trunk to New York, but at none of half a dozen shipping offices had I received a specific promise as to when it would leave and when it might be expected to arrive. I had found Gingiss in the bar at the Great Eastern later in the day and told him my story; when I had finished, the man

standing next to him, a lean, leathery-skinned man of about forty-five, had reached over and touched me on the arm.

"I'm shipping out day after tomorrow," he had said, giving the name of his vessel. "I'm the skipper and I'll take that trunk for you if you like."

"You're bound for New York?" I had asked.

"Can't tell you where I'm bound," the fellow had said drily, "but I'll take the trunk if you like."

I had immediately agreed to have the trunk at the dock the next morning, and Gingiss and I had both tried to get passage for ourselves on his ship; but to that he would not agree. So the trunk alone had sailed with him. I had addressed it in heavy black ink and had spelled my name with large capital letters: "MR. J. GEN GENOVESE."

During the ship's crossing, which had taken considerably less time than our own trip home, it had apparently run into some high seas, because when the trunk arrived in New York the address labels were watermarked and some of the lettering was completely obscured. The street address, my mother's home in Brooklyn, was quite illegible, but my name could be fairly well deciphered.

I heard the story from my brother Sal the first night I was home. "About ten days ago a fellow from Army headquarters called," Sal said, "and he wanted to know if I was any relative of Major General Genovese. I asked if this Major General was at present stationed in

India, and the fellow said yes, apparently he was, because the Army had a trunk for him that had just arrived from Calcutta.

"Well," Sal said, "of course I didn't know anything about your promotion to major general, but I said this was the right address and that I'd send down for it right away. But that wouldn't do, not with the Army. 'Oh, no sir, don't bother,' this fellow said, 'we'll send it out.' And within half an hour a couple of soldiers pulled up in front in a big army truck and carried the trunk right into the house. And they were so impressed with their mission—walking right into a major general's house—they wouldn't even stay to have a drink."

The explanation was simple when I looked at the label. The capital R in MR had faded enough to be taken for an A—and the letters M A J preceding my nickname "Gen" spelled brass hat so plainly to the swivel-chair warriors in New York that they hadn't bothered to check the list of the handful of men in the high command who have earned so distinguished a title.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Home at Last

IT HAD BEEN SIX MONTHS since I wrote that letter to Gerry Ewing, the beautiful blonde who danced in the floor show at Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe. I had yet to receive an answer, so the night after we arrived in New York Gingiss and I decided to look up Gerry Ewing and demand an explanation.

"But Captain Genovese, you're so short!" Gerry said, the very first thing when we met her at the St. Moritz. "I thought you said in your letter that you were—what was it? Six feet?"

"I don't remember," I said, embarrassed because I had been a trifle liberal in estimating my height, "but flying takes a lot out of a man. Makes you lose a lot of weight sometimes—probably affects your height, too . . ."

The picture of Gerry in *Peek* was very good, but it didn't do her justice. In the flesh she was twice as beau-

tiful, with silky blonde hair and wide blue eyes and soft red lips and a smile that crinkled around the eyes. Just hearing the soft melody of her laugh made me all wobbly inside. After she had dressed and come from her room and slipped her arm through mine, we went out and got a cab and drove over to the Stork Club, and I asked the headwaiter for a table for two.

"Aren't you all together?" he asked. I turned and saw Gingiss standing there looking rather bewildered. "Oh—oh, yeah," I said. "That's right. Make it a table for three."

The flying slump that washed me out of Randolph Field back in 1939 was nothing compared to the complete daze that engulfed me in the three weeks following my first evening with Gerry Ewing. At the end of that time I was still walking around with my head in the clouds and there was nothing to do but lay my cards on the table.

"I love you, Gerry," I told her one night, and she smiled and said, "That's nice, because I love you, too."

And so we were married.

Much as one hates to concede the fact, honeymoons cannot go on forever. Ours ran on blissfully from the end of August until early October with never once a thought of the turmoil in which the rest of the world found itself, but then reality returned in the form of a telegram from Gingiss, who had gone back home to Chicago a few weeks before.

"Have nice airline job lined up in South America," he wired. "Room for you too. Good pay and dangerous. What more could you ask?"

"What do you think, dear?" I asked, handing the message to Gerry. "Would you like to live in South America?"

Gerry read it three or four times, and then she said, "I'll tell you what I think: I think there are mountains in South America, and the first thing you know that prostate trouble or whatever it was will start up again. Incidentally, you still haven't gone to see a doctor as you said you would. Another thing I think, as long as you've asked me, is that you've done enough dangerous flying. Your work at Lockheed and at Brewster Aircraft and your knowledge of planes from all these experiences in England and in China and India ought to qualify you as an engineer for some kind of job where you could put all that knowledge to good use. Flying a plane back and forth across some mountains—why that's silly! You have the kind of experience that these airplane manufacturers need. There aren't a dozen people in the world, I'll bet, who have flown as many types of planes as you. Gingiss and his airline job! Why, I'll bet . . ."

On and on Gerry went, building up her bridegroom so vigorously that if he had listened to all she had to say and taken it seriously he would have gone out next morning and started the foundations for an aircraft factory of his own. But the bridegroom didn't listen to all of it—he was already becoming a husband.

He was thinking, instead, that some of what his wife

said was true. He had flown a great many types of planes; seventy-seven different models during the year he spent in England, seven types one day alone. He was thinking of the Battle of Britain, during the final stages of which he had been ferrying planes for the R.A.F. And crystal clear in his memory was the warm smell of the Indian jungle and the eternal chattering of the monkeys and the romantic beauty of Calcutta. All that was gone now—it was all behind him. He wondered if it would be worthwhile, or even possible, to recapture any of it again, ever—not only for himself the next time, but for Gerry, too.

The bridegroom's argument with himself was short-lived. Perhaps the South American deal would provide some thrills, maybe some fun, for sure a good income. But more important to him as well as to everyone else in the United States, if not in the world, was to get the war over with—to get back again to the comfortable ways of peacetime. And flying in South America would contribute little to that.

He returned to his apartment after an absence of two hours the next afternoon and told his bride to start packing; they were on their way to Evansville, Indiana.

"Evansville?" Gerry exclaimed. "What are we going to do—buy a farm?"

"No, Cookie, we aren't going to buy a farm," he said. "I'm going to see about a job with Republic Aviation. They have a big plant just outside of Evansville where they're turning out P-47 Thunderbolts, the hottest fight-

ing planes in the world, and there's a chance that I can get in on the deal."

"As an executive, you mean?" Gerry said, all excited.

"Well, kind of," he replied. "You see, once in a while a plane comes off the line that isn't just right, and they have to have an expert on hand to figure out what's wrong. It's a mighty responsible job—I'll be lucky if I can land it."

"Well, just so it's safe, that's all I care," Gerry said, and the bridegroom was too busy packing his suitcase to answer.

He had done his best not to misrepresent the job, but even so Gerry was pretty upset when the *Evansville Courier* carried a nice big story two days after he started to work captioned: "Captain J. Genovese Joins Republic As Test Pilot."

CHAPTER TWENTY

Nine Seconds to Live

ONE DAY several weeks ago, after I had been testing with Republic for several months, while enroute to visit some friends, I happened upon a scene of death and frightful destruction.

A plane had crashed—a bullet-fast modern fighting ship, a thing of graceful beauty built to carry death through the skies with speed and precision and sureness.

Now it was a trail of wreckage scattered over a length of five hundred yards. A gas tank was lodged in the roof eaves of a bungalow. Four hundred and fifty feet away the engine leaned lazily against the front porch of another residence. Between these two end points was a path of furrowed ground covered with twisted metal and shattered machinery.

Here a wing tip, there a ragged piece of tail assembly,

a broken landing gear, a blown-out tire—bits of nondescript and unidentifiable flotsam cast aside by the stricken plane as it plowed to its end.

Bits of other things, too—bits that you looked away from quickly as soon as you realized what they were.

For this fighting plane had, ironically, fulfilled its function. It had carried death through the skies—death to a young American pilot. He had died instantly. Nothing could have lived through that awful rending, tearing crash as plane met earth.

People from the neighborhood stood around in little groups, talking in hushed voices, awed by the tragedy of violence and death which had touched their orderly lives.

A small man in shirt sleeves, an eyewitness, was telling a knot of listeners what he had seen—how the plane, its engine silent, had circled in low, the pilot desperately seeking a place to land.

“Maybe he was tryin’ to crash where he wouldn’t hurt anyone,” a bystander suggested.

The little man shrugged. “Maybe. Don’t seem likely, though, that a man who knows he’s about to break his neck is gonna worry much about other folks.”

He went on to describe how the faltering plane had plowed through some telephone wires, bounced off the roof of a house, and finally crashed with an impact that was heard for blocks.

“Poor fella,” the little man said. “He knew he was in bad trouble. He knew he was in for it, all right.”

He wandered off to repeat his story elsewhere. I was standing near two young girls of high-school age. They stood silent, fascinated by the grisly wreckage. Then one of them said softly:

"I wonder—I wonder what went through his mind when he knew he was . . . I mean, when he knew . . ."

I shuddered a little. Because I knew the answer.

I knew, because the same thing had happened to me.

Only I walked away from mine. . . .

I guess I've flown just about everything the Allies have used in this war, from baby Piper Cubs to giant Sterling bombers.

And I've had my share of thrills in my three thousand hours of flying time. I've tangled with a lead-spitting Messerschmidt when all I had under me was an unarmed ferry ship; and I've had my Chinese co-pilot go nutty on me when his oxygen line froze on one of my 126 flights "over the hump."

I've bailed out safely after a mid-air collision that knocked me unconscious; and I've gone upstairs to play nursemaid to an amateur-flier pal who was stuck up there with a damaged landing gear on a fast ship and didn't know how to get it down.

I've had thrills and I've had laughs—but the day I'll remember till Gabriel's last toot was March 13, 1944, in Evansville, Indiana.

I was a test pilot there for Republic. One morning Vic Pixey, chief test pilot, asked me if I felt like taking up, on initial flight, a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter.

An "initial" is the test pilot's toughest chore. It has been said that one of mankind's unsung heroes was the first man who ever ate an oyster. He did something nobody had ever done before. Well, a test pilot does that every time he goes up on an "initial." He's flying a ship nobody has ever flown before—an untried, untested and highly temperamental piece of machinery which is likely at any moment to decide it doesn't like its first taste of flight, prefers the ground, and heads for same in a hurry.

But I've never met a test pilot yet who wasn't convinced that "It can't happen to me." I told Vic I could fly it, and a half hour later I was climbing into the cockpit of a brand new Thunderbolt.

I slipped into my shoulder harness—a habit I picked up in England, which prevents the pilot's head from smashing against the instrument panel in the event of a crash—after making an external check of oleo struts on the landing gear for proper inflation, control connections, propellor and turbo-supercharger wheel. Starting the powerful 2000-horsepower Pratt-Whitney engine, I made the necessary ground checks.

Satisfied that all was okay and calling the traffic control on my radio for take-off clearance, I taxied over to the long north-south runway. Cleared for take-off, I turned the ship into the wind, set the brakes "on," revved the engine up to about half power, released the brakes and sent the ship scooting along down the strip as if it were shot out of a cannon.

I ate up about five hundred yards of the runway before my six-and-a-half-ton headache—as it was soon to become—lifted itself off the deck.

Once clear of the ground, I pulled up the landing gear and began a check of the instruments and controls.

I was up about 150 feet when—bang!

Actually, it wasn't a bang—but it was the loudest silence I had ever heard.

My engine had cut out on me.

I had to fight a first impulse to turn back and head for the field. That's the natural first reaction, but it would have been suicide. I hadn't enough altitude, and any attempt to stretch it would have meant a low-altitude spin.

Pressing the transmitting button on my throttle handle I advised the control tower, "Engine failure, crash landing, straight ahead," at the same time mechanically cutting my switches. Unconsciously I visualized the "meat wagon"—the crash ambulance—darting away from its post by the tower and heading down the field.

Every detail of the terrain below was stamped on my brain with a startling clearness. I took stock of my chances and they weren't good.

A Thunderbolt lands at a fairly good clip, and needs a good stretch of smooth runway to sit down with any degree of safety. All I saw ahead of me were woods and a few scattered houses. With my meager altitude fast disappearing, I couldn't have reached a flat spot anyway unless it lay directly in front of me.

A momentary panic gripped me as the full seriousness of my situation became clear. It was only at this moment, when I had a chance to size things up calmly, that I suddenly realized how slim my prospects were. Here I was, heading for what promised to be one pip of a smash-up, and I just had to sit there and take it. There wasn't a damned thing I could do except a little last-minute maneuvering to try and make the best bargain I could with fate.

And I didn't hold out much hope of striking a very good bargain.

I had lost more than half my altitude when suddenly a high-tension line loomed up in front of me. Helpless to avoid it, I crashed into it head-on. There was a brilliant, blinding display of fireworks, but the plane shook itself free of the broken wire and careened on downward.

Three telephone poles were the next targets. The leading edge of my left wing took them, one, two, three, like pins in a bowling alley—snapped them in half. Those Thunderbolts are really put together.

Somehow the power lines and the phone poles took all the fight out of me. I felt helpless, weary. Foolishly, I resented the obstacles I had bumped into—not because they represented dangers, but because they seemed an unnecessary and uncalled-for proof of my helplessness. I felt like a lumbering drunk lurching clumsily through the air, knocking into anything that got in my way. To a bystander it must have seemed like the passing of a General Grant tank.

The ground was coming up fast, and my mind was racing a million miles a minute in a crazy kaleidoscope of thoughts. It's incredible how fast a human mind can work under stress—as in a wild dream, where a dozen things are happening at once, yet each one is crystal clear.

There was no orderly review of my past life, the way you've read in stories. And yet, after that first searing flash of panic, my mind was orderly.

"This is it," I remember saying to myself. "After all the crazy scrapes you've pulled through, this is a silly way to die. But it's not a bad way. It's quick, and sure, and while doing a very important job for my country." Strangely, I caught myself *hoping* it was sure. None of that hobbling around on crutches, or lying on a bed of pain for the rest of my life—not if I had my way.

I thought of other things too, the things I was leaving behind me. My wife waiting anxiously at home. The old bunch I would never fly with or trade lies with again. The funny little old crate (a Jenny) I had learned to fly in back in '32, when I was an air-struck kid just out of school.

I thought of the people who would stand around my wrecked plane after I crashed, and of the newspaper pictures and headlines, and I wondered if those who saw and read them would have any idea that it wasn't really bad to go out this way.

Then a strange thing happened. Suddenly I felt that I was already dead. My mind seemed divided into two separate and unrelated parts. One part was fully conscious

of what was going on around me—of the plane and its controls . . . of the whine of the air stream as the ship swooped even lower to the earth . . . of the little two-story gray frame house that suddenly loomed up in my path!

The other part of my brain told me I was dead—that this was all unreal and that I had already crashed and was lying dead on the ground.

It was no mental conflict. My two brains did not argue or debate with one another as to whether I was dead or alive. One of them, through force of everyday, practical habit, held a firm grasp on the realities, the other—perhaps that mysterious sub-brain about which science knows so little—raced ahead, anticipated the death that seemed so certain, and by some strange psychological quirk decided that death had already claimed me.

But my “practical” brain was still working full time, and I realized I was bearing down on the small house which stood in my way. In the direction I was headed, and at the speed I was traveling, I would go right in the front door and out the back. It was about 8:30 in the morning. Smoke was coming out of the chimney. People would be downstairs having breakfast. I mustn’t crash into the house or they would be sure to get hurt.

Yes, those thoughts really did come to me. I’ve heard and read arguments about whether a human being, suddenly faced with violent death, and without time to stop and ponder, can find it in himself to consider the safety of others first. The basic human instinct of self-preserva-

tion, say some, is too firmly rooted, too overwhelmingly dominant for anything else to impinge on it; and a mind in the grip of that instinct can think of nothing but its own safety.

I tell you it isn't so. I thought of those people having breakfast in that house. It wasn't heroics. I'm very fond of my neck; to me it is the finest of all necks in the world, and though I stick it out occasionally, I do not care to have it broken.

And yet, with every immediate prospect of just that unhappy occurrence, I still worried about those people. Maybe it was the resignation of a man already doomed. Or maybe my thoughts were dominated in that moment by the part of my mind which said I was already dead and what did I have to lose?

There was a tree about twenty-five feet to the right of the house. Not enough room to get through, of course, but at least I could avoid crashing the full weight of the plane into the house itself.

I aimed the nose of the ship directly between the house and the tree. As I came in, a few feet off the ground, I threw the left wing up in a sharp bank, at the same time yanking back on the stick to stall the plane.

I hit the ground at about one hundred and twenty miles an hour. Perhaps that doesn't sound like much in these days of super airspeeds, but just imagine being in an auto crash at 120 m.p.h., and you'll have a better idea.

I don't remember actually hitting. I must have passed out for a couple of seconds, because the next thing I knew

I was sitting in the cockpit of a wingless fuselage, about one hundred yards behind the little frame house.

I sat there stupidly for several seconds, while my mind and my vision stopped blurring and settled slowly into focus.

Dust was settling around the ship. I stared dumbly down at a piece of control stick which had snapped off in my hand. Then I looked out at the dust again, and the incredible, impossible truth dawned upon me.

I was alive.

With this realization came the fear of a possible fire and an overpowering desire to get the hell out of there. Almost feverishly I slid back the hood, wrestled myself out of the shoulder straps and safety belt, and clambered out onto the now-blessed ground.

Once again my thoughts turned to the people in the house. As I went toward it, I could see that my left wing had struck above the second story of the house, leaving a third of its length embedded in it. The right wing had been sheared completely off by the base of the tree. Those telephone poles had softened it up.

As I walked up the slight grade toward the house, I discovered I hadn't come away completely unscathed. My right knee was paining me, and as I tried to make it up the hill I found the going pretty tough.

However, the people now came running out of the house. There were four of them—McCutchan, their name was. It turned out that they had a boy in the Air Corps, and their only concern was whether I was all right.

WE FLEW WITHOUT GUNS

The daughter, Marjorie, a girl about twenty-two, had been washing dishes in the kitchen when I hit, and still carried a towel in her hand. I noticed the lobe of her ear was bleeding where a piece of flying debris had cut her.

I asked her if she knew she had been cut. She put the towel to her ear, brought it away and stared at the blood on it.

I caught her as she fell in a dead faint.

It was funny, and I laughed, just a little bit wildly.

I talked it all over with Vic and the boys later on, and we figured that from the time my engine quit to the time I came to in the wreckage on the ground was exactly nine seconds. . . .

I thought of those nine seconds of eternity, and all the narrow scrapes I had been through in the past three years, England and India and China, as I looked at the remains of that young American flier. I saw the pale faces of the people staring in awed silence, and the two young girls who had wondered what had passed through this man's mind when he faced death. . . .

And just before I turned away, I couldn't help thinking:

"Here but for the grace of God . . .

